

Conference on the Harmonized Implementation of the Polar Code

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It is my pleasure to participate in the Conference on Harmonized Implementation of the Polar Code, and I wish to thank the Ministry of Traffic and Communications and its Permanent Secretary Harri Pursiainen for hosting this important event.

The Polar Code is definitely a major achievement in developing the governance of Arctic and Antarctic Sea Areas. It provides ample evidence of the benefits that interaction between regional and global processes can bring.

The Arctic States certainly contributed to negotiations on the Polar Code underlining regional concerns, but it was clear that the new requirements had to be codified in global agreements.

Thinking globally may indeed be the only way to make progress in the stewardship of Arctic sea areas. International law and especially the UNCLOS are the most trusted lighthouses in the stormy seas of governance.

It is a most encouraging sign that the IMO and the WMO have decided to underline the importance of the Polar Code and the need for its harmonized implementation. Therefore the presence of Secretary General Kitack Lim Secretary General Petteri Taalas at this Conference is most welcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Finland's two-year chairmanship in the Arctic Council builds on two frameworks, climate change which is affecting all activities, and Agenda 2030 comprising the UN goals for sustainable development, which is an indispensable guidebook for the future.

Finland chose four priority areas for the chairmanship program: environmental protection, connectivity, meteorological cooperation and education. Work on all priority areas is well underway.

The general outlook in Arctic cooperation is actually quite positive. All Arctic states want to continue constructive cooperation. It is obvious that they take into consideration the challenges that lie ahead and the obvious need to address them together.

Maritime and marine issues are not mentioned as a particular priority in Finland's chairmanship program, but a quite a bit of work is going on.

I am happy to say that this Conference on the harmonized implementation of the Polar Code is doing exactly what the ministers of the Arctic Council called for in their meeting last year. It also exemplifies the Finnish chairmanship slogan: Looking for Common Solutions.

Also the recently concluded regional agreements are being implemented. Exercises are held to support the implementation of the Search and Rescue Agreement and the Oil Spill Agreement. The next exercise will be organized in two weeks in the city of Oulu and nearby in the Gulf of Bothnia. The Arctic Coast Guard Forum plays an important supporting exercises and in general capacity-building.

It is obvious that the safety and economic viability of maritime transport in the Arctic depends on reliable weather services and good communications. Connectivity and meteorological cooperation are certainly relevant themes for Arctic navigation. Next month, the Arctic Council will discuss these priority themes in a meeting in Kittilä, Finnish Lapland, where at the same time the World Meteorological Organization will organize an Arctic Meteorological week and an Arctic Meteorology Summit.

Other events will follow, and they will take into account the increasing opportunities provided by space technology and satellite-based services for Arctic navigation and other activities.

At the same time, the Arctic Council is wrestling with the general question of how to address maritime issues. At the moment they are dealt with in

several Arctic Council Working Groups, from slightly different angles. The Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation must dodge some icebergs before it present the results of its work to the Ministers next year.

The Arctic Council and its Working Groups would benefit from closer cooperation with the Arctic Economic Council in many areas, including maritime transport and connectivity. This is also the wish expressed by the Ministers last year.

An even broader issue is the general direction that the Arctic Council should take to strengthen its position as the pre-eminent international forum for Arctic cooperation. We are still digesting the legacy of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy with its fairly independent Working Groups, simply adopted by the Arctic Council in 1996. This question is addressed by the Senior Arctic Officials who are preparing a strategic plan for the Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are developments outside the framework of the Arctic Council that have a bearing on Arctic sea areas.

The negotiations on an agreement to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean were successfully concluded last year. This is an important first step involving non-Arctic states in the stewardship of the Arctic Ocean. It is also a remarkable precautionary measure preventing something that is not yet taking place.

Another significant development is the joint proposal made to the IMO by the Russian Federation and the United States on the establishment of two-way routes and precautionary areas in the Bering Sea and Bering Strait – an important gateway to the Arctic Ocean.

A third development is the Arctic Policy document recently published by the Peoples Republic of China. It is still being studied. In general terms the document seems to underline respect for international law while making clear that China has definite interests in the region. The concept of a Polar

Silk Road, included in the Chinese White Paper, is certainly thought-provoking.

Finally, I would like to thank the organizers, Anita Mäkinen, Chief Advisor of the Finnish Transport Safety Agency, and her colleagues, for vigorously pursuing the idea of this Conference and putting the program together. I wish everybody a successful Conference.