

non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in pursuit of concrete initiatives. Such progress responds to the challenges that we are all confronting in the Arctic, but that are outside the control of any single country.

The Arctic Council is, of course, not the only existing circumpolar forum or focal point for circumpolar policy development and co-operation. The Nordic Council was founded in 1972 to target co-operation on regional and common political issues. The creation of the Council of the Baltic Sea States in 1992 and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 1993, plus the anticipated adoption of the European Union's Northern Dimension Action Plan in June 2000, reflect the broader European integration process intended to bridge common northern interests. They are also increasingly focussed, as is the U.S. Northern European Initiative (which is directed primarily at the three Baltic states), at preventing the emergence of a socio-economic and environmental fault line at the eastern border between the expanding EU, its immediate northeastern neighbours, and Russia. There is a growing recognition in these regional forums of the importance of ensuring effective information sharing, co-ordination and co-funding initiatives for shared priorities.

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These various institutions and initiatives are not only preoccupied with stability in northern Russia, but also with sustainable development and environmental protection across the Arctic region. Protecting the vulnerable circumpolar ecosystem from environmental degradation and transboundary effects is another area in which international co-operation is vital. Scientific evidence shows that the North acts as a global "sink" for environmental contaminants, including persistent organic pollutants. The pollutants are transported over long distances by water and air currents, and eventually enter the animal and marine life. In fact, food from this source is the main source of nourishment for Indigenous peoples living in the North. The contaminants are absorbed in the fatty tissues of northern animals, eventually to be consumed by humans. The global community has recognized the need to reduce and eliminate the long-range transport of pollutants, and it must cement its commitment through legally binding international protocols and agreements, such as the UN negotiations toward a global convention on persistent organic pollutants.

Canada has also had long-standing bilateral agreements with the United States on a range of issues affecting the interests of both countries in the Arctic. The recently developed Canada-Norway Partnership for Action underlines Arctic co-operation as an area of common interest in the context of the joint pursuit of a human security agenda.