

# Looking to the north

Foreign Minister Børge Brende standing at the heart of the area that is Norway's most important foreign policy priority, well aware that many other countries are also looking to the north, where new opportunities are opening up and important challenges need to be met.



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**T**OP POLITICIANS including Hillary Clinton from the US, Laurent Fabius from France and Salman Khurshid from India. Chair of the IPCC Rajendra Pachauri. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We have seen them all here, clearly impressed by the spectacular Norwegian landscape – snow-clad mountains, wide skies and deep waters. The climate is changing rapidly in the north. These prominent visitors have helped to put the Arctic on the map. They have also highlighted the global implications of climate change and the importance of Norway's role in managing the abundant resources in the sea and on land in the northernmost part of our planet. The Arctic is the Norwegian Government's most important foreign policy priority.

*But why are so many people interested in a region that in many ways is an inhospitable wilderness? Even in countries far away from the Arctic?*

– Access to energy resources and other natural resources is becoming easier, and new trade routes are opening up in the north. All this is creating new opportunities.

But at the same time the impacts of climate change are particularly visible in the Arctic. This is creating major challenges that can only be tackled with knowledge, responsible management and cooperation. This is why the Arctic is becoming increasingly important internationally,' explains Minister of Foreign Affairs Børge Brende. – 2015 will be an important year for the climate. Towards the end of the year, the world leaders will meet in Paris with the aim of reaching a new climate agreement. Norway is at the forefront of efforts to limit global warming and we have clear ambitions. If we are successful in Paris, the new agreement could prove to be the most important agreement of our time, for the Arctic and for the world at large.

It is no coincidence that countries such as China, South Korea and Japan have been queuing up to be granted observer status in the Arctic Council. All the Arctic countries have shown that they take their responsibilities seriously by developing and implementing Arctic strategies. In a world full of conflicts and competition for resources, the Arctic stands out as a region where close people-to-people cooperation and dialogue across national borders is the norm, Mr Brende adds.

### Peace and the Law of the Sea

*On the subject of security policy and good neighbourly relations: there is no hiding the fact that Russia's actions in Ukraine are affecting relations between Russia and the rest of Europe. How is the situation influencing relations between Norway and Russia?*

– Together with the rest of Europe and our other allies, we are standing firm in defence of international law and international rules in the face of Russia's conduct in Ukraine. This approach is also important in the context of the Arctic.

Respect for international law and international cooperation are crucial for promoting stability and predictability in the north. These fundamental values will always be at the core of Norway's efforts. At the same time, we intend to continue our cooperation with Russia in areas where we have common interests. It is in everyone's interests that the Arctic remains a peaceful and stable region,' Mr Brende says. Mr Brende points out that the Law of the Sea provides vital guidelines for continued peaceful coexistence in the north. It is essential for Norway to take a clear and firm approach to upholding its rights and fulfilling its duties in maritime areas under its jurisdiction in the north. Norway has jurisdiction over huge areas of sea, and the Norwegian Armed Forces play a key role in monitoring and protecting these areas.

Targeted cooperation with Russia has led to improved maritime safety, higher cod quotas and action to reduce the risk of radioactive pollution. Norwegians and Russians living in the border area, in and around the towns of Kirkenes and Nikel, can now obtain local border traffic permits, which makes it easier for them to cross the border between the two countries. Since the scheme was introduced in 2012, permits have been issued to 1 749 Norwegians and 3 547 Russians. – These are all examples of important areas of cooperation with Russia that we wish to maintain, says Mr Brende.

### 'Everyone' wants to take part in the Arctic Council

Russia is by no means the only country Norway cooperates with in the north. Since 1993, the Barents cooperation between the five Nordic countries, Russia and the EU has been promoting peaceful and sustainable development in the Barents region.

The Barents cooperation was initiated in response to changes in

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the political landscape, which made closer cooperation between the eight Arctic states possible. The Arctic Council was established in 1996 as a forum for environmental cooperation. Since then, it has developed into the most important arena for dealing with the common challenges facing the eight Arctic states – and the rest of the world – in the Arctic. The members of the Council are the five Nordic countries plus Canada, Russia and the US. In addition, France, India, Italy, Japan, China, the Netherlands, Poland, Singapore, Spain, the UK, South Korea and Germany have all been granted observer status. The EU has been admitted as observer in principle and participates in the Arctic cooperation.

Business interests are moving higher up the Council's agenda, and a separate business forum, the Arctic Economic Council, was established in autumn 2014. Its aim is to provide a platform for dialogue and cooperation between the Arctic Council and the business sector. Its secretariat is to be based in Tromsø.

– Although various actors may have legitimate but conflicting interests in the north, there is no race for the Arctic or for the resources in the region. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea applies to the Arctic seas just as it does to other parts of the world. Most of the natural resources that the Arctic is thought to hold are within states' exclusive economic zones. There are very few unresolved issues relating to jurisdiction in the Arctic, states comply with the Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Arctic coastal states have committed themselves to the orderly settlement of any overlapping claims. The main challenges in the Arctic relate to other concerns, such as climate change and environmental issues, growing traffic along new sailing routes, the expansion of tourism, and greater oil and gas activity. This increase in activity levels is explained by the growing demand for energy and raw materials and the fact that the region is becoming more accessible as the sea ice melts,' Mr Brende points out.

### A region of opportunities

Foreign Minister Brende considers it important that the Government promotes sustainable business development in the north.

– We can pride ourselves on the good results we have achieved so far, but now, more than ever, it is crucial that we turn good results into lasting progress. Our aim must be for North Norway to become one of the most innovative and knowledge-driven regions of growth in the world. And this is possible. Space technology and research is one area in which the region is already a world leader. The space research cluster made up of research centres in Svalbard, Tromsø, Narvik and on Andøya is Norway's answer to Silicon Valley. My aim is to promote a results-oriented Arctic policy that fosters more "Silicon Valleys" with more knowledge-based enterprises in the north, Mr Brende says. He emphasises the fact that the Government will target its efforts towards industries with



**INTENSELY ENGAGED IN THE DEBATE:** Foreign Minister Børge Brende at a meeting with key stakeholders from Nordland county in Bodø in August 2014, where the Arctic was on the agenda.

growth potential. Priority areas will include the petroleum industry and the related supply industry, the maritime sector, the seafood industry, the mineral industry, tourism and space technology. – The petroleum sector is a mainstay of economic activity in the north, and offers unique opportunities for value creation, employment and growth, and for generating other positive spin-off effects in North Norway, Mr Brende remarks.

*How do you view the global energy situation?*

– With the Arctic becoming more accessible, we will be able to produce more energy, which the world needs. Some 1.3 billion people still do not have access to electricity, and energy poverty is a major challenge. The global demand for energy will therefore continue to grow in the years to come. An estimated 22 % of the world's undiscovered oil and gas resources are thought to be in the Arctic, Mr Brende says. – Renewable energy use should, and will, increase considerably, but a large share of the global energy supply will still have to come from sources such as gas. Gas will be an important bridge between a fossil fuel based and a low-carbon economy. Due to stringent requirements and strict regulation over the course of many years, the Norwegian petroleum sector is a world leader in terms of limiting negative environmental impacts. Greenhouse gas emissions from the Norwegian continental shelf are considerably lower than the international average.