

POLICYBRIEF

No. 02, 2025

The Importance of the Development of a Regional Strategy for the Arctic

The Case of Portugal

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Introduction

The Arctic region is crucial for the regulation of the global climate, the maintenance of biodiversity, and the intricacies of international geopolitics. It acts as a temperature regulator through the albedo effect, meaning the ice reflects the sun's rays back into the atmosphere. The unique ecosystems present in the Arctic support a diverse array of wildlife. Economically, the region is abundant in unexploited resources and offers potential new shipping routes; however, these opportunities are accompanied by considerable environmental risks. Geopolitically, the Arctic serves as a central arena for territorial conflicts and resource governance, damaging the cooperation in place by the Arctic Council since 1996. As the effects of climate change intensify, protecting the Arctic is vital for the planet's overall health, requiring a unified global initiative to ensure its sustainable future.

Facing those changes, non-Arctic states are not immune to what happens in the region. Within the European Union, some countries already have a defined strategy for the Arctic and Poles (that includes the Antarctic) and have been granted Observer status in the Arctic Council, as is the case of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain. From outside the European Union and mentioning states on other continents, attention goes to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Brazil (see itself as a Polar country), which are both considered new actors interested in the Arctic region.

Highlights

Growing Arctic geopolitics: Melting ice heightens the Arctic's geopolitical importance, urging non-Arctic states to seek governance roles amid rising tensions.

Intensified global climate effects: Rapid Arctic warming impacts global climate, requiring non-Arctic states to join global environmental strategies.

Expanded resource access: Increased Arctic resource access drives non-Arctic states to engage in governance for economic and sustainable development.

Enhanced scientific collaboration: Non-Arctic states' Arctic research roles necessitate policies for effective engagement and data sharing.

Indigenous rights crucial: Arctic governance requires non-Arctic states to include Indigenous welfare and advocate for their involvement.

Portugal's policy need: Portugal must develop an Arctic plan and seek Observer status to strategically engage with the region's importance.

Developing an Arctic policy allows non-arctic states to navigate the complexities of international law, climate change, and resource management, trying to contribute to shared experiences and data/knowledge in areas such as marine biodiversity, oceanography or glaciology.

Where does Portugal stand in this context? In order to answer this question, this policy brief is divided into three sections. The first one gives an overview of the reasons why non-Arctic states need to define an Arctic policy. The second section will present Portugal as a case study, considering that, so far, Portugal does not have an Arctic Strategy or Policy. This section will elucidate on the origins of the Resolution nº 76/2023, which recommends the government to develop an Action Plan for the Arctic (Diário da República, 2023a). Since it is not legally binding, the Government determines whether to act in accordance with it and, in the event that nothing is

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done, there will be no repercussions. Finally, the last and third section will present a set of recommendations to help improve the comprehension of the region and advance the preliminary efforts of an Action Plan and proposal for Observer status in the Arctic Council.

To conclude, Portugal possesses compelling motivations to formulate an action plan and engage proactively in the Arctic region.

Why Do Non-Arctic States Develop an Arctic Policy?

In the 21st century, several key reasons can be enumerated for non-Arctic states to define an Arctic policy, such as the following:

Firstly, as the Arctic becomes more accessible due to climate change and melting ice, it opens new shipping routes and gives access to untapped natural resources. Non-Arctic states, especially those with growing economic interests and strategic goals, need to ensure that they have a say in the region's governance and development. The Arctic's geopolitical

importance is rising, with major powers like Russia and the United States increasing their military and political presence in the area.

Secondly, the Arctic is warming four times faster than the rest of the globe. This has a profound effect not only on the Arctic ecosystem but also on global climate patterns, influencing weather and sea levels worldwide felt by non-Arctic states, facing the consequences of such events. Defining an Arctic policy helps them contribute to global environmental strategies and manage these risks.

Thirdly, the Arctic holds vast reserves of oil, natural gas, minerals, and fish stocks. As melting ice opens up new areas for exploration, there is a push for resource extraction. Non-Arctic states, many of which are energy-dependent or have interests in the global resource market, will need to

engage with Arctic governance mechanisms to ensure that their economic interests are protected. This also includes having a role in shaping regulations for sustainable development to avoid overexploitation.

Fourth, with increasing geopolitical tensions and the potential for conflict over resources and territory, the Arctic is becoming a region of heightened security concern. Non-Arctic states may have strategic interests related to defence, surveillance, or maintaining regional stability.

Fifth, non-Arctic states are active participants in Arctic scientific research, particularly in fields related to climate science, marine biology, and resource management. Research institutions and governments from non-Arctic countries often collaborate with Arctic states on climate research, wildlife studies, and sustainable resource management practices. Having an Arctic policy helps non-Arctic states engage more effectively in scientific cooperation, ensuring access to shared data and research opportunities.

Sixth, in what concerns Indigenous communities, their rights and interests are central to discussions around Arctic governance. Non-Arctic states with human rights commitments or international aid agendas often include indigenous welfare as part of their Arctic policy. Non-Arctic states can advocate for the protection of indigenous peoples' rights, ensuring their participation in decision-making processes and safeguarding their traditional ways of life.

Seventh, many non-Arctic states prioritise Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their Arctic policies, focusing on balancing economic activities with environmental stewardship and social equity. These policies also reflect a commitment to ensuring that Arctic development respects indigenous traditions and promotes long-term environmental sustainability.

Non-Arctic States articulate their interests in the Arctic in comparable manners, albeit with distinctions that reflect their unique strengths and historical contexts. Nations such as the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands possess a rich history of engagement with the Arctic, particularly in terms of exploration. Despite lacking territorial claims in the region, these countries have maintained enduring interactions with it. All non-Arctic States express a keen interest in the potential economic advantages that may arise from the Arctic's growing accessibility. Key sectors of interest include shipping, tourism, energy, and prospective fisheries. Additionally, these nations and their scientific communities aspire to participate in leading-edge research conducted in the Arctic, particularly in relation to climate change. They may also seek to shape regional environmental policies to enhance environmental protection or to address the impacts of Arctic environmental changes that could affect their own territories (Bloom, 2022).

According to Evan T. Bloom, in the article "The Rising Importance of Non-Arctic States in the Arctic" (2022), some non-Arctic countries possess foreign relations and security interests that compel them to observe and comprehend the evolving dynamics of Arctic geopolitics. This is particularly relevant in light of the strategic rivalry among the United States, Russia, and China. Additionally, these nations may have vested interests arising from the Arctic's geostrategic significance, particularly concerning aerospace defence. The same author also mentions that other Non-Arctic States are also involved in competitive dynamics with their counterparts. A number of these states, including China, Japan, and South Korea, are intent on preserving their standings relative to regional competitors in the realm of Arctic science and diplomatic efforts. Additionally, Greece meticulously considers the actions undertaken by Turkey in the Arctic, and vice versa. Similarly, the European Union and European nations that are not members of the Arctic Council share comparable motivations (idem).

Nonetheless, this kind of document also allows non-arctic states to highlight their relationship with the Arctic region, as is the case of the United Kingdom and France or Netherlands, which have a long history of expeditions in the northern part of the world.

In conclusion, it can be stated that non-Arctic states need to define Arctic policies to ensure that they are active participants in a region whose future impacts are being felt globally. Whether for economic interests, geopolitical stability, environmental protection, or scientific research, these states need to safeguard their roles in shaping the Arctic's development. By formulating a comprehensive Arctic policy, non-Arctic states not only protect their national interests but also contribute to broader international cooperation in managing one of the most sensitive and strategic areas on Earth.

The Case of Portugal: An Action Plan for the Arctic Through a Telescope Lens

According to historians, Portuguese discoverers (as explained by Boorstin, 1985) in the Arctic between the 15th and 17th centuries reached North America 20 years before Columbus (Elliot, 1888; Cortesão, 1940; Brazão, 1965). Portuguese settlers, João Lavrador and the Côte-Real brothers, were the Portuguese pioneers in Labrador and Newfoundland (Canada). Since that time, the country that headed the First Globalisation (Costa, Rodrigues, & Oliveira (2014) and Wet Globalization (Mentz, 2022) did not look North. Going back in time shows that the Arctic is familiar to Portugal.

Non-Arctic states need to define Arctic policies to ensure that they are active participants in a region whose future impacts are being felt globally

Portugal currently lacks a defined Arctic Plan and Policy or any framework that articulates its interests and concerns regarding this region, nor does it elucidate the connections between the Arctic and the Atlantic, particularly in relation to Portugal's strategic position. Merely being a member of the European Union and adhering to its strategies is insufficient to ensure a robust standing in matters related to ocean and polar governance. The contribution is further realised through the establishment of its own strategies and policies, which must align with those of the EU.

While accompanying a NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Norway a few years ago, Lara Martinho, a former deputy at the Portuguese Assembly, came up with the idea for a draft resolution in 2021, as she shared with me during an online conversation in 2023. The initiative started because of the worries shared about Russia back in 2016. In 2021, twelve deputies of the Portuguese socialist party signed the Draft Resolution nº 919/XIV/2.³ (Parlamento Português, 2021). This proposal aims to recommend an action plan for the Arctic to the government. In light of the elections held in 2021, progress was notably stagnant until 2023. Following outreach to the deputies, the timeline unfolds as follows.

The deputy who spearheaded the initiative in 2021 consented to the request for an interview, which took place online on 27 April 2023. During this conversation, the deputy expounded on how personal experiences in Svalbard, Norway, while participating at NATO's Parliamentary Assembly in previous years, enabling the understanding of the importance of the frozen region and its prospective implications, opportunities, and challenges for Portugal. The socialist deputies who endorsed the above-mentioned draft resolution of an Action Plan for the Arctic in 2021 acknowledged that the electoral events of that year hindered progress on the initiative. When

June 2023.

The in-person meeting at the Parliamentary Assembly on 22 June 2023 proved to be quite engaging. It is understood that the matter at hand transcends the purview of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Action, necessitating the involvement of several other ministries, including Defence, Foreign Affairs, Economy, Maritime Affairs, as well as Science, Technology, and Higher Education. The forthcoming steps are now independent of their input. It is clear that as a sovereign nation, Portugal (Madeira and Azores islands included) must commit to safeguarding an area that may expand, adopting a proactive stance and formulating its own policies in alignment with the frameworks established by the European Union and NATO.

While a specific strategic framework concerning the Arctic and its connection to the North Atlantic is lacking, this does not mean that the country is not aware of the challenges the area might be facing or will face in the future.

In Resolution nº 76/2023, it is acknowledged that Portugal is at the forefront of impacts generated by climate change, a condition that enhances the need to improve monitoring in response to these evolving conditions. It is also recognised that the Arctic region presents opportunities for marine research and study of the ocean, as well as for the advancement of space infrastructures, which Portugal is keen to promote, develop, and investigate. Furthermore, the text of Resolution nº 76/2023 highlights that Portugal, characterised by its maritime

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a government is dissolved, the proposals do not carry over to the succeeding administration. It is necessary to restart the whole process once again. In the wake of the pandemic and the departure of the visionary deputy, the Arctic initiative has regrettably faded into obscurity since that time. In the absence of any information regarding the proposal, two deputies were approached via email in December 2022 to inquire about the status of this matter. They both acknowledge that the outreach proved influential and productive in revitalising the discussion with a newly formed commission. On 5 May 2023, Project Resolution nº 675/XV/1 (Diário da República, 2023b) was subsequently introduced regarding an action plan for the Arctic. The approval occurred on 7 June 2023, and it was subsequently published under Resolution nº 76/2023 on 29

heritage and central position in the Atlantic, possesses distinct advantages in aligning itself with the interests of Arctic States, particularly its allies within NATO and the EU, as well as the policies they have established in the region. Situated in the North Atlantic, Portugal's Azores archipelago holds a strategically significant location.

Consequently, it is in the national interest to mitigate potential instability in the area, thereby promoting a safe and demilitarised Arctic, especially considering Portugal's role as a gateway to the Arctic Ocean (Diário da República, 2023b). The three key points of the Resolution nº 76/2023 are: 1- to develop a national action plan for the Arctic, in line with principles of sustainable development, taking into

consideration four different critical dimensions in question such as environmental, economic and social, in areas that range from guidelines for: a) the Portuguese flag fleet, b) combating climate change, c) environmental protection to research opportunities scientific and strategic infrastructure, and d) security in the Arctic circle; 2- to contribute to the implementation of both existing and forthcoming European Union integrated policies pertaining to the Arctic, as well as in the advancement of a cohesive strategy for the Union concerning Arctic development; and 3- to consider applying to the Arctic Council as an Observer state (Diário da República, 2023a).

An essential aspect that has not been properly addressed in the document is the recognition and concern towards Arctic Indigenous Peoples. The text references the inhabitants of the Arctic only once, in the context of the national interest to adopt models for exploring the potential of the region that are in line with international standards on sustainable development, respect for human rights, indigenous peoples and local populations, as well as the environment (Diário da República, 2023b). The omission of Arctic Indigenous peoples in the recommendations outlined in the Resolution discussed in this section may indicate a deficiency in understanding this region as well as a lack of knowledge. It should be underlined that criteria number 6 of the Arctic Council informs that “candidates should take into account the respect for the values, interests, culture and traditions of Arctic indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants” (Arctic Council, 2013, p. 14). Portugal has not ratified the ILO 169, 1989 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989) but voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDPRI) (United Nations, A/RES/61/295, 2007). In addition, it is essential to emphasise that the Arctic countries have not yet ratified this convention. Only Norway and the Kingdom of Denmark ratified.

Reflecting on history, embracing sustainable practices of ocean uses can foster a profound reconnection, revealing similarities that bind Portugal, the Arctic and its inhabitants, such as whale hunting. A way of life of the Azores islands until the 1980s.

In what concerns a candidacy for the Observer status, the proposal, in contrast to the Action Plan, shall not address security concerns, as these issues are outside the scope of

the Arctic Council’s mandate. This exclusion was deliberately established in 1996, as declared in the Ottawa Declaration (Arctic Council, 1996). A thorough comprehension of the circumpolar area allows the government to commence the formulation of a proposal for the Observer status as outlined in Resolution nº 76/2023. Various essential issues must be addressed, such as the rights of Arctic Indigenous Peoples, international law, economic relationships, historical connections to the Arctic, and Portugal’s contributions to the Indigenous communities and the Arctic region, ocean science, research, climate change, marine environment and protection, sustainability and cooperation.

A significant aspect of the Portuguese contribution to the Arctic Council is the understanding and secular knowledge of the ocean, encompassing both the research conducted and ongoing studies in Portugal, as well as the emphasis on

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cooperation and multilateral efforts. Initiating the preparation of a proposal draft can prove advantageous. This proactive approach will engage various ministries in the Action Plan along with Portuguese scientists, enhancing their knowledge of the Arctic region’s significance and allowing them to envision Portugal’s rightful contributions to the North Atlantic and Arctic basins. As a result, the relationship between the ocean and security strategies can be more deeply interconnected, particularly with regard to the Arctic region.

Recommendations

In this context, it is possible to present six recommendations to be taken into consideration for the Action Plan, which can be transformed into an Arctic Policy or Polar Strategy, meaning it would include the Antarctic, where Portugal is a non-consultative party of the Antarctic Treaty since 2010.

1: it is crucial to examine the global trends projected for the upcoming decade, as these will play a pivotal role in shaping the Action Plan for the Arctic. This consideration underscores the potential ramifications for Portugal, particularly regarding emerging maritime routes that affect transportation and

connectivity. Additionally, it is important to be equipped for potential environmental incidents at sea, enhance research to better understand the effects of climate change on coastal regions, and foster a comprehensive awareness of the interrelations among climate change, ocean, and Arctic security, as outlined in Resolution nº 76/2023.

2: it is advisable to explore more scientific collaborations with both Arctic and non-Arctic nations, including those that currently hold Observer Status and those interested in seeking such status. Enhancing and promoting Portuguese ocean expertise, ancestral knowledge, marine environment, as well as the work of Portuguese researchers from natural sciences and social sciences in the Circumpolar North. Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the contributions of Portuguese researchers in both the natural and social sciences within the Circumpolar North. The integration of Indigenous and traditional knowledge is not only beneficial but also necessary in this framework.

3: Portuguese foreign policy and diplomacy can be strengthened and helpful in maintaining and working on multilateralism and cooperation in both regions (Atlantic and Arctic), which are pillars of Portuguese foreign policy. Additionally, Portugal can be the bridge between CPLP states (Community of Portuguese Language Speaking States) and the Arctic region/states.

4: find common ground through cooperation and research regarding the soil and subsoil of the continental shelf and supporting informed decision-making to avoid deep sea bed mining. Moreover, shared experiences and knowledge regarding illegal fisheries can be exchanged in a comparison context, finding solutions to be adopted and adapted to the specific context of the Arctic Ocean. Portuguese Atlantic experience in different maritime contexts and threats is an asset to face global threats to maritime security in an intertwined framework (Atlantic – Arctic).

5: deepen the economic ties and evaluate new opportunities between Portugal and Arctic countries.

6: is to appoint an ambassador or representative, not only for the Arctic region but potentially for both polar areas, with a stronger presence in international forums related to the Arctic and linking to the ocean as a pivotal leader by promoting international cooperation.

These recommendations have the potential to serve as foundational elements of the Action Plan or Arctic Strategy/

Policy, aligning with the priorities established by the Norwegian Chairship for the biennial period of 2023-2025 (Oceans, Climate and Environment, People in the North, and Sustainable Economic Development, Arctic Council, 2023). Hopefully, it might not be that different from the next Chairship's priorities for the biennial period of 2025-2027, led by the Kingdom of Denmark, starting in May 2025.

Conclusion

The Arctic region, characterised by its extraordinary ecosystems and pivotal role in maintaining the Earth's climate, finds itself at a critical juncture. As the ramifications of climate change become increasingly pronounced, the urgency to safeguard the Arctic has never been greater. The choices humankind makes today regarding its stewardship and conservation will resonate through time, impacting the global environment and future generations. It is imperative for the international community to acknowledge the profound interdependence between the health of the Arctic and the well-being of our planet as a whole, uniting in efforts to secure a sustainable future. The Arctic transcends its image as a distant, icy area; it is an essential component of the Earth's fragile equilibrium, with its destiny knottily intertwined with our own.

The Arctic is global, as stated in 2013 at the Arctic Circle Assembly. This truth resonates more profoundly today than ever before.

The formulation of the Action Plan in Portugal can yield benefits in two distinct manners: firstly, it can broaden the Atlantic perspective to encompass the Arctic, and secondly, it can facilitate the development of official documents, such as national maritime security and an updated defence concept that would include the Arctic region. This way, it expresses the holistic perception of the ocean and of a globalised, interconnected world.

The Arctic vision on the horizon is reimaged, and it is revealed that it is reachable. The complexity and multiplicity of topics that are part of the Arctic region need to be well understood by policy and decision-making. The action plan must incorporate researchers who possess knowledge of the region and its governance frameworks to ensure that Indigenous communities are adequately represented. An understanding of the implications of a global Arctic, along with an analysis of how Portugal is impacted, will enable the nation to effectively address the challenges posed by a potentially ice-free ocean by 2027 (Marsden, 2024).

Portugal, a notorious nation of the Atlantic, has historically embarked on journeys to Arktikos. Now, in a new setting and at a pivotal moment, it is prepared to sail once again to and in the Arctic. Portugal possesses the capacity to assume a prominent position in the realms of cross-boundary science and governance. With its rich heritage and capabilities, along with culture and an array of competencies related to the ocean, the country has the capacity to serve as a significant and impactful participant in the Arctic region, promoting cooperation within the Arctic Council and beyond it. The Arctic is familiar to Portugal.

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Publisher: United Nations University Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS), Bruges, Belgium

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