

Oil & Gas industry**EU rethinks opposition to Arctic oil and gas drilling**

U-turn by Brussels would be bitterly contested by environmental groups



A view of the waters of the Barents Sea. A policy reversal would most benefit Norway, which is the second most active country in developing an oil and gas industry in the Arctic after Russia © Ozge Elif Kizil/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

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The EU is considering dropping its opposition to new oil and gas drilling in the Arctic as it seeks to shore up energy supplies in response to the crisis in the Middle East.

The [EU](#) has been pushing for an international ban on new oil and gas drilling on environmental grounds since 2021 but it is now weighing abandoning the proposal, according to multiple people familiar with discussions and a document seen by the FT.

The U-turn could come as part of a review of the EU's Arctic policy due by the autumn, several of the people said, although they cautioned that discussions remained at an early stage.

The EU's 2021 goal to "push for oil, coal and gas to remain in the ground" in the Arctic came before Russia's 2022 [full-scale invasion of Ukraine](#) and more recently the [Iran war](#) exposed the bloc's reliance on imported fossil fuels.

The document seen by the FT acknowledged there had been "no progress" on securing backing from international partners for a moratorium on new drilling, and that the European Commission wants to assess "what alternatives might be considered" to the 2021 proposal.

Urmas Paet, an Estonian member of the European parliament who led a report on the Arctic Policy in 2025, said the Commission was looking at "lifting" its call for a ban, based on discussions with officials.

One senior EU official said "it seems" Brussels will soften its stance on Arctic oil and gas drilling. "Taking into consideration the recent political developments and . . . relations with the United States, we need to diversify our market and co-operate with like-minded countries," the official said.

A spokesperson for the Commission declined to comment.

A policy reversal would most benefit Norway, a non-EU member, which is the second most active country in developing an oil and gas industry in the Arctic after Russia.

Norway, western Europe's largest petroleum producer, has become an increasingly important supplier of gas to the EU since 2022, and has positioned itself as the democratic supplier of choice to the bloc. It has tried to link that status to lifting the EU's opposition to Arctic drilling.

"This is great for Norway. When this obstacle is removed it means that we can get closer to the EU on other stuff such as space and other defence issues," said one Norwegian official.

In a proposal to the EU earlier this month, Norway called for the bloc to "acknowledge the significant potential for strengthened" co-operation between Norway and Europe in the Arctic "grounded in shared interests in stability, sustainable development and resilient infrastructure".

Oslo has long argued that its oil and gas production and exploration in the Barents Sea — north of the Norwegian mainland and below the Svalbard archipelago — is different from the classic view of the Arctic, as it is ice-free and easy to access.

“There are no icebergs or polar bears in the Barents Sea. Yes, it’s north of the Arctic Circle but it’s not Arctic as most people consider it. We have pushed the EU for years and years to concede this,” a senior Norwegian official said last year.

Oslo has also been selling its expertise in the Arctic and far north to both the US and EU, arguing that its knowledge is crucial in being able to contain Russia in the critical so-called Bear Gap, between the northern Russian-Norwegian border and Svalbard, where Moscow has a high proportion of its nuclear weapons stationed.

The prospect of relaxing calls for a global moratorium comes after more than 10 oil and gas companies and industry groups last month [seized on](#) arguments about energy security in response to an EU consultation on its Arctic policy, stressing the need for the bloc’s continued access to hydrocarbons.

Yet such a move would be bitterly contested by environmental groups who have argued that any review would be contrary to international commitments made by the EU on greenhouse-gas emissions and biodiversity.

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