



1.5.2017 - Today, [Finland](#) will assume the Chairmanship of [the Arctic Council](#) for the two-year period

[2017–19](#)

, its key objectives being the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable

Development

Goals (SDGs).

The Arctic Chairmanship rotates among the Arctic States (Finland, Iceland, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Canada and the USA), each of them assuming the lead position for two years at a time.

Combating climate change and the melting of the Arctic has become more pressing than ever.

Sea ice extent

has hit a

[record low](#)

for the month of January, both in the Arctic and Antarctic.

The Arctic sea ice extent averaged 13.38 million square kilometers in January 2017. This is 260,000 square kilometers - an area bigger than the size of the United Kingdom - below the levels of January 2016.

In addition, a new report from the [Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme \(AMAP\)](#) highlights the rapid and widespread changes in the Arctic's sensitive climate systems mostly due to rising concentrations of greenhouse gases.

According to the Report, the Arctic's climate is shifting to a new state. "With each additional year of data, it becomes increasingly clear that the Arctic as we know it is being replaced by a warmer, wetter, and more variable environment. This transformation has profound implications for people, resources, and ecosystems worldwide," says the report summary.

While the Arctic could use more freezing temperatures, the cold winds are instead blowing in the diplomatic field making the chairmanship even more challenging. Russian President Vladimir Putin has issued [statements](#) denying climate change as man-made, and US President Donald Trump has been repealing the country's climate regulations and threatened to leave the Paris Agreement. However, scientists have warned that the Arctic Ocean could be largely free of sea ice in summer as early as the late 2030s - only two decades from now.

"Temperatures in the Arctic are quite remarkable and very alarming," [according to](#) David Carlson, Director of the World Climate Research Programme, as the implications for the global climate system may be dramatic. "What happens at the Poles does not stay at the Poles."