

Wiebke Pankauke, Head of Unit, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), European Commission (Facilitator): *What concrete commitments do we need from member states and the European Union to transition European polar observation from fragmented, project-based funding into a permanent, unified infrastructure?*

Maria Grigoratou (Executive Secretary European Polar Board, Head of the European Polar Coordination Office)

The answer is not only to move from project-based observation to permanent infrastructure. It is also about ensuring continuity, strengthening coordination, and connecting the capabilities we already have.

European countries already have monitoring programmes, national observing and research infrastructures, and operational capabilities in both poles. But looking at the Arctic specifically important parts of observation still depend on shorter funding cycles, and the different elements do not always connect effectively.

So, for me, the answer is **continuity, coordination and complementarity**.

First, Member States need to sustain the national monitoring and observing capabilities that provide the long-term backbone of European polar observation.

These are national assets, and their continuity cannot depend entirely on European project funding. Transnational access (TA) to RI projects by the EU has proved its “value for money”. The EU through POLARIN is now able to report that it put in place the first TA Project, and made access to critical RI operational on land and sea for both poles at international scale within and beyond Europe for the first time. So we need to congratulate EU for transforming a vision to an operational reality.

Second, the EU needs a clear and continued polar research and observation trajectory in FP10. At the European Polar Board, we are calling for a dedicated funding mechanism in FP10. We need continued investment in polar science, new technologies and new observing approaches. But we also need to ensure that strategically important observations do not disappear when individual projects end. Horizon research should strengthen and innovate the observing system while building continuity with long-term monitoring and infrastructure.

Third, the EU should invest in EPCO and capitalise on the coordination capacity Europe has already built.

The European Polar Board has more than 30 years of experience coordinating European polar organisations, and the EU has invested for ten years through EU-PolarNet in large-

scale coordination of European polar research. EPCO is an important legacy of that investment.

EU should capitalise on it. EPCO can help connect European expertise, research priorities and observing activities, and strengthen Europe's contribution to international observing systems.

And let me be clear: **This is not coordination for coordination's sake. Having a coordination body that brings the EU funded projects together implemented and when needed guided by the European Polar Board to ensure that Europe's research is addressing key research and observation needs is a mechanism that no other funder has at this scale.**

This is particularly timely now. The European Ocean Pact, OceanEye with its links to GOOS and the forthcoming Ocean and Water Research and Innovation Strategy create an opportunity to connect the Arctic, and Antarctica, much more strongly to Europe's wider ocean-observing agenda.