

Chapter 6

Arctic Europe Between National Interests and Arctic Governance

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ABSTRACT

From an economic point of view, melting ice is making the Arctic ocean increasingly important for a number of countries – Arctic states as well as non-Arctic states. Also, the EU has clear interests in the area. This chapter provides a brief description of those interests and its implications on the EU's relationship with the Arctic partners. This note takes seven aspects of the EU-relations with the Arctic states into consideration (i.e., the institutional framework, the EU Arctic interests and policies, shipping, fishing, marine mammals, offshore oil and gas operations, and the EU's Arctic partners).

INTRODUCTION

The general intent of this chapter is to give an overview of the current state of political affairs in and around the Arctic providing a reader with reliable reference information gathered from authentic sources on both the Arctic states policies and the existing institutions of international cooperation proceeding with an analysis of the reasons behind the collaboration efforts and conflicts between the major stakeholders in the Arctic in the 21st century.

The political landscape of the Arctic is drawn giving special attention to the Nordic countries of Europe. Particularly, the chapter deals with the EU Arctic interests and national interests as well as policies of Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland addressing both the economic development of internal Arctic territories and political ambitions in the broader Arctic region. In each case, the Arctic relative importance for national economy, environmental and political security is analyzed. Next, official strategies for pursuing national interests in the Arctic are epitomized with special attention being paid to international cooperation as an instrument of national Arctic policy. In conclusion, the discovered similarities and principal divergences between national Arctic strategies are stated.

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The main contradictions and conflict lines among the Nordic states are set forth including conflicting views on the legal status of the Arctic, the international regime, prospects of common use of natural resources and free trade, the mutual accusations and territorial claims. At the same time, the authors show how the awareness of common interests and common challenges a single nation state is not capable to meet leads to a partial paradigm change resulting in the reciprocal cooperation efforts made by the Nordic states (even if not in the same degree) and the establishment of international institutions fostering joint research and sustainable development in the Arctic. At once, a reader is provided with an explanation why not all the Arctic states are equally enthusiastic about the international cooperation, and why only little progress is made in the long road to the genuine Arctic governance.

BACKGROUND

The Arctic Council

The Arctic Council (AC), consisting of eight member states that are actually fully or partly located in the region, as well as 13 observer states and six indigenous NGOs, is the major international coordinating institution of the Arctic Region. Among them, the Arctic Five take a special position. The USA, Russia, Denmark, Canada, and Norway believe they are to play a stewardship role in the conservation and management of the Arctic.

In broad terms, the AC during its first decade appeared to be an intergovernmental forum primarily for environmental science cooperation, run for the most part, by scientists, notwithstanding its broad Arctic mandate set within the rubric of foreign affairs. The AC has variously been characterized as a forum for scientific cooperation and information sharing, a body for regional agenda-setting and multi-lateral policy shaping, and more recently by some commentators as even a governance mechanism (Keil & Knecht, 2017). The choice of the word “forum” was important: it reflected that the AC was to be a process primarily for information-sharing and dialogue, at least initially. In other words, the AC was not a formal international organization, nor an institution with a legal personality. The AC’s six working groups have significantly advanced knowledge and understanding of the Arctic systems and has led to substantive actions in some areas of international policy and law.

The EU has no direct coastline with the Arctic Ocean and it even does not have the status of observer to the AC. Still, it wishes to play a constructive role in the Arctic. This is caused by five factors. First, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, all three AC members, are EU member states as well and try to use EU’s economic weight and soft power to manifold their voice in the AC. Second, seven EU member states (France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, and Italy) are observers to the AC. Third, it maintains strong relations with Norway and Iceland through the European Economic Area. Fourth, it has separate partnership agreements with Greenland, an autonomous part of Denmark. Fifth, it financially supports research in the region since the Arctic is crucial for climate change monitoring. Further, it is important to notice that the European Arctic is a part of the Arctic Region (Circumpolar Arctic) and that the EU Arctic (the part of the Arctic Region that is located in the EU-countries) is a part of the European Arctic (Liu, Kirk, & Henriksen, 2017). Thereby, the EU legal acts directly concern the EU-Arctic.

In recent years, the AC has become a framework within which the Arctic states convene to negotiate functional agreements, some of which are legally binding. An Agreement on Co-operation on Aeronau-

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