



GERMANY'S ARCTIC POLICY – BETWEEN ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY

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— ABSTRACT —

In the last years, as a result of climate changes, plenty of transformations have taken place in the High North. Consequently, ice cap of the Arctic is melting at a very fast pace, and that means significant rise of sea levels as well as decreasing animals' habitats. On the other hand, disappearing Arctic ice is opening new areas of exploitation for humans. The Arctic might also soon become the world's most important reservoir of clean water and food. The warming is leading to changes in ecosystems, arousing a number of enquiries about territorial division of the region, its preservation and utilisation. The changes taking place in the Arctic pose a challenge on many levels: economic, social, security, and environmental protection. First of all, economic (access to probably the biggest deposits of oil, gas and precious metals in the world) and ecological (environmental protection) interests are clashing there. The North Pole, although with varying intensity, is becoming present in foreign policies of many countries. On the Old Continent, it has been noticed by the whole European Union as well as particular countries. One of them is Germany. Germany is interested in the region from the economic and ecological perspective.

— KEYWORDS —

Arctic, Germany, Arctic policy

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INTRODUCTION

The icy North Pole has always been an interesting area for scientific research. Today, it focuses the international community's attention due to significant changes in its landscape. The Arctic, unlike other geographical regions, is the area of rapid and intensive climate changes caused by industrialized and developing countries. They have led to many transformations in the High North. Consequently, the ice cap is melting faster than estimated, which means the rise of the sea level and shrinking habitat for many species (Symonides 2008: 31–32). The phenomenon, though, may enable navigation in the sea routes on the Arctic Ocean, which consequently will intensify international trade and influence the direction of its development. The ice-free period in the Arctic is to increase from 30 days in 2010 up to 120 days in the 2050s. It is therefore possible that the Northeast Passage, known as the Northern Sea Route (NSR), as well as the Northwest Passage, stretching from the Atlantic along the northern coast of North America, will become navigable for a few months in a year. The new northern navigation routes shorten the distance between Europe and Asia, which draws attention of many countries.

Melting of the ice cap in the High North changes its geostrategic position. As the interest in the Arctic grows, there is an increase in the region's geopolitical value. Scientists, politicians, and journalists make various speculations concerning the future scenario for the High North. In this international discourse, it is very important not to lose sight of the region, as the ongoing events may bring major consequences not only for the Arctic countries, but also for the whole international community (Heininen 2004: 207).

The High North is the region of exceptional opportunities and challenges. Identifying new relations between the Arctic and the rest of the world is crucial from both political and scientific perspective, as they become an important part of global geopolitics (Osica 2010b). We are witnesses to the growth of a new region, in the political meaning, exemplifying an important tendency in international relations (Osica 2010a). The course of the events is being observed by many countries of the world. Their policy towards the Arctic remains currently *in statu nascendi* (Kubiak 2009). However, the ongoing environmental, geopolitical, and geoeconomic changes and their consequences make it inevitable for the European diplomacy to refer to the problem. It is connected with both hopes (concerning the exploitation of mineral resources, mostly gas and oil, and new sea routes above the Arctic circle) and fears regarding the perspectives of the

further peaceful development of the region, and also the scope and character of the international cooperation in the region. In this way, the remote Arctic becomes the centre of interest for countries seeking unlimited deposits of mineral resources, natural resources, and new navigation routes. On the Old Continent, it has been noticed by particular countries as well as the whole European Union (Łuszczuk 2010: 156).

Due to the global warming and rapid melting rate of the ice sheets, the Arctic is becoming increasingly important for the international community in geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocologic terms. It has also become the focus of Germany's policy. Germany has decided to outline its aims and interests in the High North. Their priorities are compatible with the Arctic states' strategies. They focus mostly on civilian issues in international relations, but military aspects are equally important in the context of rescue actions and navigation safety. Generally, a number of principal issues can be distinguished: sovereignty and safety, development of transport and economy, exploitation of natural resources, protection of the environment and indigenous population, management and rescue (connected with potential sea accidents), scientific research, and international cooperation (Heininen 2011).

BEGINNINGS OF GERMANY'S INTEREST IN THE ARCTIC

Germany's interest in the Arctic dates back to the 19th century and concerns polar research. German scientists have been exploring both Poles since the mid-19th century. Carl Koldewey was the leader of the first German expeditions to the High North in 1868 and 1870. Georg von Neumayer carried out the exploration of the Antarctic region as the president of the International Polar Commission and one of the founding fathers of the first International Polar Year. Alfred Wegener, in turn, created the theory of continental drift (also known as Wegener's Theory) and in the early 20th century conducted a number of expeditions to Greenland.

In 1974, after the Federal Republic of Germany had joined the Arctic Treaty, the preparations to coordinate polar research by one institution were started. As a consequence, the Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) with its official office in Bremerhaven was established. The German Democratic Republic had its own program of scientific research. In 1957, German scientists joined the expedition to the Antarctic organised by the Soviet Union. Consequently, a research centre

of Georg Forster was established. After the reunification in 1990, polar programs of both countries were joined under the aegis of the AWI.

The AWI's polar research makes the Arctic an interesting area of scientific relations. The institute has the leading position in interdisciplinary scientific research focusing on climatic changes, biodiversity, melting of the sea ice, as well as oceanographic, biological and geological changes. Its objective is to inform the public and policy makers about the potential local and global consequences of climate changes in the Arctic. The institute operates a number of research stations in polar regions, e.g. on Svalbard (French and German collaboration), or on Samoilov Island in the delta of the Lena River in northeast Siberia (Russian and German collaboration¹). Moreover, it runs six research ships, including Polarstern, the icebreaker. The AWI employs about 900 scientists and its total annual budget amounts to EUR 100 million.

The Federal Institute of Geosciences and Natural Resources is another renowned participant of polar research. It examines geological structure of the Arctic and estimates polar resources. The main objective of the institute is to provide the Federal Government with information concerning accessibility and transport of mineral resources (*Rapid Climate Change in the Arctic*, 2012: 14).

Tradition, quality, and the scope of German polar research have initiated the political engagement of Germany in the Arctic. As underlined by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century and a key foreign policy task. Especially since the disappointing climate summit in Copenhagen in late 2009, a stronger role for foreign policy in international climate policy has been called for – climate diplomacy" (Wyciszkiewicz 2011: 19; *Climate Change – A Foreign Policy...*, 2011; *Climate Diplomacy. New Approaches*, 2013).

The increase of political and economic importance of the Arctic region led the Federal Government to outline guidelines for the Arctic policy. The document was adopted in September 2013, and entitled *Guidelines of the Germany Arctic Policy. Assume Responsibility, Seize Opportunities*.

¹ In August 2013, AWI scientists embarked on a three-year research project with Russian partners trying to answer the questions of how the ecosystem is influenced by climatic changes and what consequences they carry for the Arctic region and Europe. The project's budget is estimated to be EUR 7 million.

INTERESTS AND AIMS OF GERMANY'S ARCTIC POLICY

The guidelines of Germany's Arctic policy are highly universal and should be perceived in a wide perspective including the European Union and NATO's approach to the High North. German interest in the region is three-dimensional, i.e. economy, ecology and safety related. Germany is interested in the development of transport and scientific research, as well the control of sea routes along the northern coast of Europe. On the one hand, the country contributes to the protection of the Arctic environment and ecosystems, but on the other, it is committed to exploit geoeconomic opportunities of the region. This dual interest can be seen in the title of the *Guidelines of the Germany's Arctic Policy*: "Assume responsibilities, seize opportunities".

At the conference entitled "Arctic Science, International Law and Climate Change" organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011, Guido Westerwelle, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, outlined three goals Germany would like to achieve in order to make research and economic exploitation more compatible with one another. Firstly, research in the High North should be as free as possible and conducted with minimum bureaucracy. Secondly, the strictest environmental standards must always be observed and enforced in order to protect the fragile ecosystem of the Arctic. And thirdly, there must be clear rules of liability for any damage to the environment of the region (*Safeguarding the Future...*, 2011).

Similarly, at the "Arctic Dialogue" conference in Bodø (Norway) organised in March 2014, Axel Berg, the German Ambassador to Norway, claimed that Germany is committed to set standards concerning the protection of the environment, exploitation of economic potential and energy resources of the region (as they hold advanced technology for exploitation). The country aims to guarantee freedom of navigation and scientific research, as well as safety and sustainability of the region. These aims are to be achieved by close cooperation with all the countries of the Arctic region, especially with Norway, which shares the same view in almost all issues of foreign policy (*Ambassador Dr. Axel Berg Speech*, 2014).

The Arctic remains of special interest for Germany, as it is the country of the biggest export, the biggest economy in the European Community, and with the largest population. Its economy is highly dependent on the import of energy resources. Currently, 58% of German gas and oil come from Russia and Norway, the countries which have already reached for the Arctic deposits (Steinicke 2014:

133). Exploitation of the Arctic resources may increase sustainable energy and minerals supplies for Germany as well as for the European Union. Except for gas and oil, German economy depends on the import of minerals, including rare earth elements, which are necessary for the development of “green technologies” (e.g. to produce wind turbines). Germany also invests in exploitation and is ready to provide knowledge and technology necessary to extract raw materials deposited below the Arctic ice. Harsh weather conditions and technical challenges require advanced technologies and know-how. This, in turn, creates opportunities for German companies which cooperate with companies in Russia and Norway in terms of seeking energy sources, exploitation and use of gas reserves. For instance, the German company Linde supplied Statoil, the Norwegian energy company with technology for recovering liquefied gas in the Snøhvit (*Snow White*) field, discovered in 1984, on the Barents Sea (*Snøhvit Job...*, 2002). Another example is Wintershall, the company which operates within two ranges, i.e. exploration and production of natural gas and oil, and which cooperates with Statoil in the Arctic. It also cooperates with Russian Gazprom (*Gazprom and Wintershall...*, 2013). Two other German companies, E.ON Ruhrgas and BASF, are involved in gas exploitation in the Yuzhno-Russkoye field, situated in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Russian Krylov State Research Center in Saint Petersburg, one of the world leaders in research for the marine industry, cooperates with the Nordic Yards shipyards in Wismar and Rostock-Warnemünde, the world leaders in specialised shipbuilding. In April 2013, they signed an agreement on scientific and technical cooperation, as well as a number of contracts for specific projects, involving the joint work on the design and construction of complicated and technologically advanced ships to customers in Russia and Europe (*Krylov Research Center and Nordic...*, 2012).

Germany also backs opening new shipping routes from Europe to Asia (90% of German export relies on sea transport, therefore the marine sector is of crucial importance for the trading relations with the rest of the world). Germany has the third largest merchant marine in the world (approximately 3600 vessels) and the world's largest fleet of container ships. The shipbuilding industry is one of the strategic branches of German economy. Their shipyards create a niche market requiring highly advanced technologies in order to provide icebreakers and vessels to ship liquefied gas in the Arctic conditions. German shipyards expect orders to increase as they provide drilling platforms, high-tech vessels used for gas and oil exploration as well as for installation and servicing offshore

wind farms (Gerlach 2014). The Northern Sea Route in the Northeast Passage² may create new opportunities for German shipping thanks to shorter travel times, less fuel use and lower costs (German cargo ships are using the routes to deliver goods to West Siberia) (Norton 2009; Phalnikar 2009). Navigation companies hope to use the Northeast Passage to transport goods between Europe and East Asia. The new routes may bring 40% savings in comparison to traditional navigation routes across the Suez Canal. Shorter distance reduces fuel use (which has ecological effect), lowers personal costs and fees. Reducing the number of days at sea results in increased income and potentially bigger profit³. What is more, piracy remains a discouraging factor in navigating across the conventional routes, with a 100% increase in insurance costs for vessels sailing through the Gulf of Aden towards the Suez Canal only in the period from September 2008 to March 2009 (Campbell 2012). On the other hand, financial profits of ship companies connected with shorter travel time may not be high due to logistic and technical challenges. Shippers must take into account unpredicted and violent weather conditions, e.g. ice storms, extreme temperatures (which may negatively influence on-board devices), or undetectable ice blocks. These obstacles may naturally close some parts of the region and cause costly delays in transport. Navigating in the Northern Sea Route may currently be less profitable due to Russian commission fees based on the volume of cargo ships. Throughout the biggest part of the year, sailing in the NSR waters must be assisted by Russian atomic icebreakers. In late July 2012, Putin established the Northern Sea Route Administration, a federal treasury institution whose aim is to provide icebreaker service for other vessels. The payment is determined in accordance with the legislation on natural monopolies (*Vladimir Putin Signs Law on..., 2012; Northern Sea Route Administration, 2014*).

The development of the Arctic natural resources and increased shipping may endanger natural environment, security and health of the indigenous people. Germany recognises the special situation of the Arctic peoples and campaigns for

² The Northeast Passage – shipping route connecting Europe with the Pacific Ocean, along the northern coast of Eurasia, traversing the Barents Sea, Kara Strait, Kara Sea, Vilkitsky Strait, Laptev Sea, East Siberian Sea, Da Longa Strait, Chukchi Sea, and Bering Strait. In the summer of 2009, two German merchant ships, *Beluga Fraternity* and *Beluga Foresight*, were the first non-Russian vessels to navigate along the Northern Sea Route to Russia and further to Rotterdam.

³ The NSR shortens the travel from Shanghai to Hamburg of 6400 kilometres in comparison to the route across the Malakka Strait and Suez Canal. The ships sailing from Yokohama to Rotterdam cover the distance of 21000 kilometres if they go through the Malakka Strait and Suez Canal. The route across the Arctic could shorten the distance up to 13000 km.

the protection of their right to a free and self-determined life in their homeland. Although shipping and maritime transport are still rare in the Arctic, the Federal Government supports the necessity to follow strict environmental standards to regulate navigation in the region (*The Arctic*, 2013). The need for environmental protection and ensuring sustainable development are strongly emphasised in the German policy. The government insists on establishing protected areas in order to preserve biodiversity of the High North. The Arctic may be treated as the “system of early recognition”. Melting ice causes the increase of global warming and the rise of sea levels. This, in turn, brings interest in climate changes and their observable consequences that may affect the German coast of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, especially the port of Hamburg. Referring to that problem, Germany initiated a number of national and international programs⁴ to combat global climate changes, e.g. through limiting the use of conventional energy resources and thus protection of the environment and reduction of global warming (*Council Conclusions on EU Climate...*, 2011; *Climate Change – A Foreign Policy Challenge*, 2011). The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has emphasised that “ensuring sustainable development requires comprehensive basic knowledge and deep understanding of the key processes at work. This is critical as the risks for the Arctic ecosystem and society arising from climate change and commercial exploitation are largely unknown. The same applies to the feedback effects on the global climate” (*Rapid Climate Change in the Arctic*, 2012).

The course of events in the Arctic may influence the architecture of trans-European security together with Russian and the USA’s strategies. Military conflict between the countries of the Arctic regions is rather unlikely. However, as in any place in the world with ongoing international conflicts, theoretically, military and political forces may become involved. Berlin, in cooperation with Oslo, aims to develop its own military activity in the High North. Together with the EU and Norway, the Federal Government makes efforts to broaden its influence in the Arctic. According to the German Ministry of Defence, the Arctic Ocean is “the most profound maritime challenge of the near future”, which may lead to “resurgence of territorial disputes” (*German Foreign Policy*, 2010).

⁴ In July 2011, following joint British and German suggestions, the EU Foreign Ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) admitted that climate changes must be treated as a threat to economic growth, prosperity and stability. The Council called all the EU institutions to address climate diplomacy at all levels.

On the other hand, Germany imports energy resources from Russia and thus is disinterested in the conflict. Additionally, it emphasises the need of international regulation of potential sources of conflict in accordance with the binding laws. The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants to ensure that the region will remain “common heritage of all mankind” and that the five countries bordering the Arctic will admit that other countries may access the resources of the region (Schwägerl, Seidler 2011). The Arctic should only be used for peaceful purposes and the Federal Government supports preventive actions which are taken to avoid conflict by building trust and cooperation⁵. However, Rolf Einar Fife, the chief international law expert in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, claims: “No one other than the coastal nations should be concerned about the question of overlapping territorial claims in the Arctic” (Schwägerl, Seidler 2011).

Germany, nevertheless, foresees possible NATO interventions in the Arctic. The fact that four out of five countries bordering the Arctic Ocean are NATO members may mean that in case of territorial disputes with non-NATO member countries, the Transatlantic Alliance may get involved (*German Foreign Policy*, 2010). Moreover, Germany points out to the risk that the Arctic may be nationalised by five coastal countries when the sea ice melts, providing access to the sea floor. Similarly, Rüdiger Wolfrum, an expert on international law and a judge on the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg, claims that the perspectives are unfavourable for German scientists and their polar expeditions. “The German scientists will probably have to put up with considerable restrictions”, he said. He also emphasised that if the rate of territorial claims remained unchanged, the sea floor, with a few small exceptions, would become largely nationalised (Schwägerl, Seidler 2011).

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs admits that recent events in the Arctic are a corporate matter. The view was shared by Michael Zenner, the German Federal Republic Ambassador to Denmark at the “Arctic Shipping Routes: Challenges Ahead” conference in Copenhagen in April 2014. In his speech, he emphasised that the High North has a tremendous impact on global climate. Temperatures in this region rise faster than in other parts of the world, which

⁵ Germany regularly participates in the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR), which is to ensure peaceful cooperation around the Arctic, especially in rescue actions. It is an informal structure for meetings of top army officers of all member countries of the Arctic Council (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States), as well as other countries interested in the region: France, The Netherlands, Great Britain, and Germany.

has a great impact on people and environment, even those far from the Arctic. The results of scientific research are necessary to understand these changes. He postulated that non-Arctic countries should also have the right to access the Arctic resources. Moreover, he emphasised that the coastal states have the right to regulate and authorise maritime research in their zones and they are also obliged to support international cooperation in this matter (*Speech of Ambassador Michael Zenner...*, 2014).

Germany has been presenting its views concerning the High North issues in the forum of the Arctic Council since 1998, when it was granted an observer status. The Federal Government opts for increasing the number of observer countries in the Council and appointing others, e.g. the European Union. Moreover, it advocates institutional strengthening of the regional cooperation. As an EU member country, Germany supports the EU policy in the Arctic and emphasises the idea of coherence on the Arctic issues, i.e. in terms of foreign policy, security, scientific research, environmental protection, energy and resources, industry and technology, transport and fisheries.

Germany has been observing the transformation process in the Arctic with great interest and has successfully undertaken the public debate in this issue as can be documented by a number of initiatives and conferences concerning the region. The international conferences organised in Berlin by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with other countries of the Arctic region (i.e. the conference with Norway and Denmark in 2009, with Finland in 2011, and with Norway in 2013) have been an important forum for the debate concerning the region. Another Berlin meeting titled "Sustainable Shipping in the Arctic – Prospects for International Cooperation" took place in April 2014, and related to transport issues in the Arctic.

CONCLUSION

Until recently, the Arctic has remained of little importance for political scientists. Nevertheless, political analysis of various and complex phenomena taking place in the High North has become increasingly vital and necessary. Political and climatic issues are closely related. The discovery of natural resources in the Arctic and the ongoing climate changes which have led to the opening of new northern sea routes have resulted in the increased interest in the region. Therefore, the international dialogue on the issues of military presence in the context of security,

exploitation of natural resources, protection of the environment, development of navigation and tourism, continuation of scientific research must be the order of the day. Considering its size, the Arctic begins to have a disproportionate impact on the world. It has become the key region whose changes may be connected with complex social, political and economic issues of global importance.

Non-Arctic countries have been preparing fundamentals of active policy concerning the High North by purchasing or constructing vessels able to break the ice of the Northern Sea Route, planning transport, operating research stations (whose task is to assess climate conditions or potential natural resources) and conducting studies referring to politics, law, and diplomacy in the Arctic. Germany remains one of them. The country has a long tradition of engagement in the Arctic issues due to its polar research. Today Germany is interested in the region from the economic perspective, i.e. as a consumer of Arctic resources and a stakeholder of opportunities brought by melting ice sheets. On the other hand, Germany notices environmental risks caused by transformations in the High North and supports long-term goals of climate protection on the international level. The Federal Government aims to ensure the freedom of scientific research, navigation and access to potential energy resources of the Arctic. It also intends to guarantee that the strictest environmental standards are respected and a polluter will be liable for any damage to the environment, as well as that efforts of particular countries will be focused on eliminating conflicts and increasing security and stability of the region.

Realistic diagnosis of the Arctic matters forces Germany to take such decisions and actions that guarantee efficiency. Pragmatism of Germany's Arctic policy relies on understanding economic and ecological importance of the High North. Utilitarianism can be seen in terms of sustainable supplies of natural resources. In this case, Germany has chosen the northeast vector. Two coastal countries of the Arctic, Russia and Norway, are the most important energy suppliers and they are referred to as two main subjects of cooperation in Germany's Arctic strategy.

To conclude, Germany in the Arctic is a spectator rather than an actor. Its future policy in the High North has been designed with characteristic pragmatism. Although Germany lies outside the Arctic region, it pays particular attention to global problems of natural environment and, therefore, should be involved in international discussions and actions concerning the Arctic. However, despite the declared engagement in polar matters and the willingness to strengthen the position of observers in the Arctic Council, Germany failed to

appoint an Ambassador to the Arctic like other non-Arctic observer countries (France and Japan). Carefully created guidelines and their flexibility prove that in practice Germany's activity in the Arctic depends on the EU engagement and is carried out within the EU policy.

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