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The Arctic Council as a Forum for Peaceful Cooperation in the Arctic

Abstract: The Arctic has been affected by the climate change stimulated institutionalisation of cooperation among 'Arctic nations', and the Arctic Council has been influential toward a peaceful future. The purpose of the paper is to analyse the Council as a regional intergovernmental organisation facilitating nonviolent cooperation and collaborative solutions toward the Arctic, preserving its ecosystems and natural environment. The research questions are how the Council deals multidimensionally with the Arctic and what is conflict potential due to security developments. The thesis is that the Council is effectively performing its missions as a cooperation forum despite differing agendas among members and observes. One of the reasons is that the military aspect is not included in the agenda. The paper is based on qualitative research founded on academic papers and official documents, including member states and observer nations' perspectives and positions toward the region and Council. The assumption is that the Council must distinguish between individual national and shared goals to preserve peaceful cooperation. The teamwork is essential but is increasingly complicating as of differing nations' agendas. The paper is contributing to systematise the perception of the Council and the challenges it is facing.

Keywords: Arctic, Arctic Council, regional security, international cooperation, intergovernmental organisations.

Rada Arktyczna jako forum pokojowej współpracy w Arktyce

Abstrakt: Zmiany klimatyczne w Arktyce wpłynęły na instytucjonalizację współpracy „państw arktycznych". W tym kontekście utworzenie Rady Arktycznej było ważne dla pokojowej przyszłości regionu. Celem artykułu jest analiza Rady Arktycznej jako międzyrządowej organizacji regionalnej promującej pokojową współpracę i skoordynowaną eksplorację Arktyki, z zachowaniem jej ekosystemów i środowiska naturalnego. Pytania badawcze dotyczą tego, jak Rada radzi sobie z obecną wielowymiarową sytuacją w Arktyce oraz czy istnieje potencjał sytuacji konfliktowej w związku z ewolucją sfery bezpieczeństwa. Teza artykułu przyjmuje, że obecnie Rada Arktyczna skutecznie wypełnia swoją misję jako forum współpracy, pomimo różnych

celów państw członkowskich i obserwatorów. Jednym z problemów jest nieujęcie w programie aspektu militarnego. W artykule wykorzystano badania jakościowe oparte na analizie oficjalnych dokumentów i opracowań akademickich, w tym stanowiska państw członkowskich i obserwatorów wobec regionu i Rady. Oceniono, że Rada Arktyczna musi dokonać rozróżnienia między indywidualnymi oraz wspólnymi celami państw, tak by kontynuować pokojową współpracę. Współpraca jest kluczowa, jednak staje się coraz bardziej złożona ze względu na różne cele zaangażowanych państw. Artykuł powinien przyczynić się do usystematyzowania i lepszego zrozumienia działań Rady Arktycznej oraz wyzwań, którym musi sprostać.

Słowa kluczowe: Arktyka, Rada Arktyczna, bezpieczeństwo regionalne, współpraca międzynarodowa, organizacje międzynarodowe.

Introduction

The Arctic has been a matter of attention for the last two decades due to new opportunities for access to natural resources and the possibility to open marine lines of communications because of climate change. Lately, it presents new concerns related to regional security with the possibility of conflicts emerging as a new hotspot in this cold area. The main risk here is a growing strategic competition in the area between Russia and the United States. It is a complicated strategic puzzle due to the outcome of increasing interest from so-called non-Artic actors such as China, which recognises itself as a 'near-Arctic' state (see: Rainwater, 2013; Van der Klippe, 2014; Guschin, 2013; Śliwa & Elak, 2018). Notably, China continuously underlines a need to respect the rights and interests of non-Arctic states after having been granted observer status in 2013 (Sørensen & Klimenko, 2017, pp. 5–11). It is not only about those three powerful actors, as the High North offers economic benefits for any nation interested in the exploration of Arctic resources; Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and European countries like France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom are among them. The inauguration of the Arctic Council, the successor of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), proved to be a joint decision aimed toward a peaceful dialogue of all nations interested in the Arctic (Nilson, 1997, pp. 153–155). Moreover, international organisations as NATO (Horobets, 2019; Coffey & Kochis, 2018) and the European Union (European Commission, 2019; Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019) have evolved their perspectives toward closer interest to the region. Therefore, there is an essential role for international organisations in facilitating cooperation and avoiding competition, which is counterproductive for all the actors interested in exploiting the Arctic. The competition cannot

entirely be excluded with the hope that all interactions would be peaceful only (Breitenbauch H. *et al.*, 2019). The governance of the Arctic, conducted through varied international organisations, allows for a facilitation of constructive cooperation among nations in the exploration of the region and the preservation of the natural environment there (Shea, 2019; Graczyk, 2012, p. 141). It is of critical importance as only international institutional cooperation can overcome the effects of global warming, as it influences all the areas of life in the region, including indigenous populations, the natural environment, and a variety of animal species living specifically in the region (Graczyk & Koivurova, 2013). Another aspect is that only through constructive and coordinated approaches can the region be protected from the devastating consequence of possible uncontrolled exploration of natural resources, as the Arctic is "about cooperation, not conflict" (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2013, p. 6).

The paper aims to present the Arctic Council as a regional intergovernmental organisation that aims to facilitate peaceful cooperation and coordinated solutions toward the predictable exploration of the Arctic, nonetheless preserving its ecosystems and natural environment. The question is how the Council deals with the present multidimensional situation in the Artic. Next, the paper investigates the potential for conflict due to developments within the security domain. The challenge due to regional security and sustainable development is how effectively the involved nations can establish such cooperation and healthy competition when they often possess competing interests. As for now, the Arctic Council has effectively performed its missions as a cooperation forum, although there are differing agendas within members and observes. Moreover, it was successful by not including military aspects into its agenda of meetings but instead discussing other regional domains like promising "zone of cooperation and joint problem-solving while recognising the distinct geography, demographics, and economics of the Far North" (Lanteigne, 2019). The paper is based on the positive perception of the Council as an intergovernmental organisation. It is based on constructivism claiming that those are making "cooperation among states be more likely" (Nugroho, 2008, p. 92) by "constitutive effects" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 7) and liberal institutionalists recognising their role in promoting cooperation, stability and causing to "govern state behavior" (Burchill *et al.*, 2005, p. 64). Therefore, intergovernmental organisations "may facilitate cooperation among member states" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 1), and this is related to the Council. The paper focuses

on a more detailed study of the last decade as the development of principles and role of new observer nations caused created an impetus in the Council works. Although nations' roles and interests are mentioned within the text, those do not act as the focus, as the Council in its organisational form takes precedence. The paper is based on a qualitative case study applying analysis of the Arctic Council official documents, a critical interpretive synthesis that allows an understanding of the area's essence in question and its interpretation. It includes a consideration of member state and observer nations' perspectives and positions toward the region and the Council. The quantitative research is implemented only to collect quantitative data to highlight the significant differences among the eight Arctic nations strongly.

The paper is composed of four parts. The first focuses on the reasoning behind the establishment of the organisation as a regional initiative with growing importance. It includes an overview of its aims, based on the Arctic Council's essential documents and primary data from the eight-member nations. The broader reach of the Arctic Council through its approval of new observers and the deployment of working groups is included in this paper presenting as well. An interesting feature of the organisation is the recognition and inclusion of indigenous people to the Council to utilise their knowledge and expertise; this aspect is covered in the paper's following part. It is followed by a generic description of the working method of the organisation during the last decade, including highlights of the last Ministerial Meetings, primarily through highlighting the change in the US position toward the Arctic, which could hamper joint decisions. The study allows drawing conclusions related to the organisation's role as a forum for cooperation and its future.

The Origins of the Arctic Council

Among the international and intergovernmental organisations related to the governance of the Arctic[1], the most recognised is the Arctic Council, which is composed of member states, indigenous permanent participant organisations, and observer states and organisations, which meet during a variety of fora and cooperate within thematic working groups. The recognition of the necessity

[1] Among the Arctic related organizations, there are the Nordic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, the International Maritime Organization, the Five Arctic Ocean Coastal States (informal group), and the World Winter Cities Association for Mayors.

of cooperation among so-called Arctic nations and a joint approach toward regional issues started already in 1989 when the Consultative Meeting on the Protection of the Arctic Environment happened in Rovaniemi (Arctic Council Chronological list of meetings, including initiation meetings 1989-1997, 2017). It was conducted within the framework of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) initiated by Finland, to which the country invited other Arctic states. The reason for the meeting was that Helsinki assessed the environment and concluded that adequate protection of the Arctic could be managed only through intergovernmental cooperation, scientific research, and by monitoring the ecosystem. Therefore, to make these domains effective, the common approach had to be formalised (Rothwell, 1996, pp. 231–232). Within the AEPS format, the most important event was the high-level Ministerial Conference on the Protection of the Arctic Environment in June 1991, again in Rovaniemi. The importance of the meeting was highlighted due to the signature of the 'Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment,' called the 'Rovaniemi Declaration' (The Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment, 1991) and by the presence of observers from the three nations of Germany, Poland (Graczyk, 2012), the United Kingdom and from one organisation, the United Nations (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe United Nations Environment Program). Another significant aspect of the event was that it was the first meeting with the active participation of organisations uniting Arctic indigenous peoples, and they contributed, for the first time, in preparing a strategy for the Arctic. Among them, there were Inuit Circumpolar Conference, Nordic Saami Council and USSR Association of Small Peoples of the North. The eight Arctic countries at the time (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Soviet Union, and the United States) recognised the need of cooperation as of " growing national and international appreciation of the importance of Arctic ecosystems and an increasing knowledge of global pollution and resulting environmental threats" (On the Protection of the Arctic Environment, 1991, p. 6). They jointly developed Arctic Strategy, declaring five objectives (The Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment, 1991, p. 9; Bloom, 1999, paragraph IV) as follows: to protect the Arctic ecosystem, including humans; to provide the protection, enhancement, and restoration of environmental quality and the sustainable utilisation of natural resources, including their use by local populations and indigenous peoples in the Arctic; to recognise and to seek to accommodate traditional and cultural needs,

values, and practices of the indigenous peoples as determined by themselves, related to the protection of the Arctic environment; to review regularly the state of the Arctic environment; and to identify, reduce, and as a final goal, eliminate pollution.

Among the main problems to treat as priorities, the signatories declared these to be persistent organic contaminants, oil pollution, heavy metals, noise, radioactivity, and acidification, specifying the sources of these pollutants and establishing multilateral conventions and bilateral agreements related to facing them. It was visualised through the initiation of the first two working groups to frame cooperation (The Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment, 1991, pp. 12–19). The document was the first official organisational statement on the Arctic, and it did not include financial aspects nor finalised legal authorities (The Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment, 1991, pp. 7–8)[2]. Moreover, not all dangers were taken into consideration. Nevertheless, it was definitely a correct step into the future extended and synchronised teamwork. During the initial phase of the establishment of the organisation, a few other meetings allowed for the creation of the final structure of the Council, leading to the signature of the foundational 'Ottawa Declaration' in 1996. One of the most important coordination papers in this process was the 'Joint Communique of the Governments of the Arctic Countries on the Establishment of the Arctic Council', signed in September in Ottawa, as the timeframe between November 1996 – September 1998 was the period of the Canadian Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. In this context, it is significant to mention Canada's role, as it supported the concept of creating an organisation like the Council from November 1990 onward, when the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs Joseph Clark forwarded the idea to the other Arctic States. Among them, US officials were especially reluctant, but when the Democrats won the 1992 presidential elections, the situation changed entirely; however, the United States only would conditionally join, e.g., the Council could not address security-related issues (Van der Zwaag *et al*., 2001, p. 13). When considering the Council working mode, the leadership is rotational, and it changes every second year, but the Standing Secretariat, which became operational in 2013, ensures continuity. During such two-year periods,

[2] It was acknowledge that the Strategy will be „*carried out through national legislation and in accordance with international law, including customary international law as reflected in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*".

there are usually three to five meetings of Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) of the Arctic Council. These individuals representing each member state are authorised to decide on behalf of their respective governments. The most crucial role is dedicated to Ministerial Meetings of the Arctic Council by member states, and those Arctic Eight's decision-making rights are "jealously guarded" (Nord, 2015, p. 60).

The 'Ottawa Declaration' – or in full, 'the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council' – was signed by representatives of eight Arctic states, namely Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and the United States (The Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, 1996). The three organisations representing indigenous populations were declared as Permanent Participants, giving them full rights for consultation on the Council decisions and actions. The intent to transfer AEPS into the Arctic Council was "*to widen and intensify Arctic cooperation*" (Graczyk & Koivurova, 2013, p. 4) within the better organisational framework. Therefore, the Declaration allowed other similar intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary, and non-governmental organisations to join with an option for non-Arctic states to receive an observer status (The Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, 1996, paragraphs 2 and 3). The nations that joined AEPS as observers were allowed to preserve a similar status in the Council, which was crucial as previously they were somewhat marginalised, and the new observer status provided them better visibility of regional developments (Nilson, 1997, pp. 31–34). Such a statement opened the door for other nations as well, and it caused interest in joining the Council, allowing observation of its work and of watching other nations' undertakings in the region. To some extent, it was the unavoidable and just recognition of the growing interest of non-Arctic nations in the region in search of new options for access to resources and new shipping lanes via the Arctic Sea. The Arctic nations wanted to use the Council as an organisational framework that would allow them to affect, control, or shape such developments.

In the 'Joint Communique of the Governments of the Arctic Countries on the Establishment of the Arctic Council', the Ministers and Senior Representatives of the respective governments recognised the role of scientific cooperation and the need for non-Arctic countries, governmental and non-governmental organisations to cooperate with the Council (Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, 1996). They established the initial priorities to be adopted

by the Council, including the development of rules, procedures, and terms of reference for sustainable development programs as a basis for collaborative projects ensuring the successful transition of the AEPS into the Arctic Council. The task was completed during the 1997 Ministerial Meeting in Norway. The document formalised membership and announced that decisions are to be taken based on consensus, giving equal rights to all eight nations. The consensus principle has been of critical importance in order to avoid a situation in which 'big players' dominate the others.

Table 1. Arctic Council members – comparison (2018).

Country	Population (mln)	Total area (km2)	GDP (bln USD)	Military expenditure (% GDP)	Armed forces	No of polar icebreakers
Canada	37.1	9,984,670	1tn 713	1.27	72 000	15
Denmark	5.8	43,094 (without Greenland and the Faroe Islands)	352.058	1.35	15,100	-
Finland	5.5	338,424	273.961	1.4	25,200	-
Iceland	0.353	103,000	25.882	0.0	0	-
Norway	5.3	323,802	434.751	1.70	23,000	1
Russian Federation	144.5	17,098,246	1tn 658	4.2	1,454,000	46
Sweden	10.2	450,295	551.032	1.0	30,550	-
United States of America	327.2	9,833,517	20tn 494	3.42	1,359,400	3

Sources: NATO, 2019; IMF, 2018; SIPRI, 2018a; SIPRI, 2018b; The Arctic Institute, 2018; The World Bank, 2018; The Heritage Foundation, 2019.

This decision was taken as the member nations differ strongly in many aspects (Table 1); this consensus-based decision-making gives them equal rights in taking commonly agreed results of meetings. The challenge is that such differences, especially in the case of GDP or military budget and capabilities, could potentially affect this parity giving those more powerful nations leverage over the others. The confrontation risk is not the case as for now, as stated by Norwegian Admiral Bruun-Hanssen, the Arctic is "probably the most stable area in the world" (Russo & Donlevy, 2019, p. 158). Some differences among the nations were visible with the 'Ilulissat Declaration' that concerned the Arctic Ocean when the five littoral states of the Arctic Ocean expressed their exclusive rights to make decisions over those waters (Nord, 2015, p. 60). Moreover, the evolving character of international relations and China and India's growing roles could further make the governance of the Arctic more complicated, as it could influence the role of smaller Arctic Eight nations. The 'Ottawa Declaration' acknowledged the aims of the Council as a high-level forum as follows (The Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, 1996, paragraph 1):

- To provide means for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among the Arctic States with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic;
- To oversee and coordinate the programs established under the AEPS on the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); and Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR);
- To adopt terms of reference for, and oversee and coordinate a sustainable development program;
- To disseminate information, encourage education, and promote interest in Arctic-related issues.

It is remarkable that military security issues were not included in the agenda of the Arctic Council, which was especially important for the United States and Russia. It has been an essential factor allowing reaching consensus among nations, especially with Russia in relation to agreeing with the Arctic Council agenda during successive leadership. However, the statement by the US Secretary

of State Mike Pompeo during the 2019 Arctic Council session has changed the approach to this security aspect. Discussing the Russian military build-up, he stated: "Do we want the Arctic Ocean to transform into the new South China Sea, fraught with militarisation and competing for territorial claims?"; the comparison is rather self-explanatory (LIVE, 2019; Shea, 2019; Weitz, 2019).

Although the Council has not made bonding agreements or treaties, its importance has increased due to fruitful cooperation in recent years. The security aspect is, nevertheless, important. Even though military conflicts are not very likely in the area soon, there is a visible growth of military presence there. The United States, Norway, Canada, and Russia – members of the Council – have had military and naval exercises in the region (Lanteigne, 2019; Śliwa, 2015). Nevertheless, it is estimated that despite "Russia's military build-up, and Pompeo's recent remarks, the Arctic remains one of the world's calmer regions" (Shea, 2019). Nonetheless, although both the European Union and NATO include members and non-members of the Arctic Council, neither organisation has been active enough in the region (Van der Togt, 2019; Weitz, 2019), although both expressed an interest in the area. Such a situation is significant as these organisations could potentially play a role in building cooperation, trust, and security in the area. The United States similarly had not been active but later paid more interest to this hemisphere when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended the Nuuk Ministerial Meeting in 2011 (Nord, 2015, p. 54). Observing the growing interest of additional countries in cooperation with the Arctic Council, the five 'Arctic states'[3] had a meeting in Ilulissat, Greenland, in 2008 and adopted 'the Ilulissat Declaration' stating among others,

> "The Arctic Ocean stands at the threshold of significant changes. Climate change and the melting of ice have a potential impact on vulnerable ecosystems, the livelihoods of local inhabitants and indigenous communities, and the potential exploitation of natural resources. By virtue of their sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in large areas of the Arctic Ocean, the five coastal states are in a unique position to address these possibilities and challenges. In this regard, we recall that an extensive international legal framework applies to the Arctic Ocean as discussed between our representatives at the meeting in Oslo on 15 and

[3] The five Arctic coastal states are Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States.

> 16 October 2007 at senior officials' level. Notably, the sea law provides for important rights and obligations concerning the delineation of the outer limits of the continental shelf, the protection of the marine environment, including ice-covered areas, freedom of navigation, marine scientific research, and other uses of the sea. We remain committed to this legal framework and to the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims" (The Ilulissat Declaration, Arctic Ocean Conference, Ilulissat, 27 – 29 May 2008).

The five nations meet on an ad-hoc basis. Those are not legally framed; follow-up meetings continued in Chelsea in 2010 and in Oslo in 2015 to discuss international legal regimes applicable to the Arctic unregulated fishing (Kuersten, 2016, p. 390). The important factor is that the bodies mentioned above are not competing as "in certain circumstances, the Arctic Council can produce the actionable data, and the Arctic Five can act" (Kuersten, 2016, p. 393). For the observer states not possessing member status of the Council, the declaration has made an impression that they are excluded from the Arctic. It includes a few nations, as during Ministerial Meetings, some Non-Arctic States were approved by consensus as observers, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom in 1998, France in 2000, and Spain in 2006. The exclusion also refers to other three members of the Arctic Council as "Iceland, Finland and Sweden – were unhappy that the Declaration appeared to relegate them to the status of 'other users' in the context of the Arctic Ocean" (Dodds & Ingimundarson, 2012, pp. 24–25) giving an advantage to 'Arctic Five' group.

The rights of observers are limited within formal documents; however, their role is crucial as they contribute to a variety of Working Groups. It has different forms, including participation and financial contribution to specific projects by designated experts based on the decision or invitation of the respective Working Group Management Board or Steering Committee. The Council is also supporting other regular meetings, e.g., the Arctic Energy Forum, which started in 2007, creating "a remarkable forum where nations can meet, share information, and discuss or debate core matters" (Fabbi *et al.*, 2017). That aspect is vital in a broader sense, as the Council contributes to sharing information and debates among nations considering carefully very different perception of their policy toward natural resources in the Arctic. It is not only about oil, gas, and fish but also about the protection of the natural environment and ecosystems in the whole

area. There are six focused working groups (Working Groups, 2020): Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME), and Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). The names of the groups are providing an image of their specific areas of expertise and interest. There was another example of task-oriented groupings; in May 2019, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and the United States were joined by the European Union., China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea to "to ensure a smooth entry into force of the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean" (Preventing unregulated fishing in the Arctic, 2019). Finland and Sweden were not present, but the association, after the ratification of the agreement, is generating a hope of support towards balanced fishery exploration based on a scientific approach and the implementation of a precautionary management regime. It could be seen with respect to different agendas and priorities, which are based on pragmatic interests of respective members and observes within the Council. However, as of now, it is not causing any specific tensions based on common interests.

The Indigenous People Membership

The Arctic Council will stay a central institution playing "an important role both as the core institution for Arctic politics and also as a link to and between other institutions dealing with Arctic issues" (Albert & Vasilache, 2018, p. 10). This is as the Council, and all the member states, recognise the Arctic indigenous people as an integral part of the heritage and culture of the region. It is estimated that some 4 million people live in the region, and among them, "approximately 500,000 belong to indigenous peoples" (Permanent Participants, 2019). Their importance for the region and its protection and development was highlighted by David Balton, Chair, Senior Arctic Officials as "the Arctic Council would not be the Arctic Council as we know it without the participation of the Indigenous groups" (We are the Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic, 2019). Currently, six organisations are among Permanent Participants of the Arctic Council, as follows: the Aleut International Association (AIA); the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC); the Gwich'in Council International (GCI); the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC); the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and the Saami Council (S.C.).

The Indigenous Peoples Secretariat (IPS) represents those organisations with their own board, budget, and work plan; it was activated in 1994 within the AEPS and is recognised in the 'Ottawa Declaration.' Although initially it was located in Copenhagen, the new location was selected in 2016, and now the Secretariat is situated in the Fram Centre in Tromsø, Norway, along with the Arctic Council Secretariat. Although the official language of IPS is English, documents are presented parallel in Russian to communicate effectively with indigenous people from Russia. Among primary functions, the IPS is focused on (Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, 2019):

- Facilitation of participation of Indigenous Peoples' organisations in the work of the Arctic Council and presentation of the perspectives of Indigenous peoples in the Council's Working Groups and during meetings of SAOs and Ministers;
- Enhancing the capacity of the Permanent Participants to pursue the objectives of the Arctic Council and assistance to make best contributions to the Council's work;
- Facilitating dialogue and communications among the Permanent Participants and other Arctic Council and related bodies;
- Supporting the indigenous organisations in carrying out actions to maintain and promote the sustainable development of Indigenous peoples' cultures in the Arctic;
- Gathering and disseminating information on and provide and list sources of different forms of knowledge, and contributing to public awareness of Arctic Council issues through a website and regularly produced newsletters and other publications.

The role of Permanent Participants and the IPS is vital, as they possess current and well-grounded knowledge about the Arctic based on their historical understanding of the environment. Such knowledge must be taken seriously under consideration, and it must not be neglected based on respective national interests and profit. Therefore, the "role of Arctic indigenous peoples and their Traditional Knowledge in the conservation and sustainable use of Arctic biological resources" (Ottawa Traditional Knowledge Principles, 2015) is valued, and it has been already recognised in the 2009 'Tromsø Declaration'. It was later distinguished in 2013 in the 'Kiruna Declaration', leading to recommendations for the Integration of Traditional and Local Knowledge into the Work of the Arctic Council during

Ministerial Meeting in Iqaluit in Canada in 2015. The role of those organisations was further highlighted by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as "some communities have begun to deploy adaptive co-management strategies and communications infrastructure, combining traditional and scientific knowledge" (Field *et al.*, 2014, p. 9). The indigenous populations aim to develop the region; however, with their support, as expressed by Gunn-Britt Retter Head of Arctic and Environmental Unit Saami Council, "there should be no reason for outside actors to believe that the Arctic is an empty space with some scattered people waiting for economic development to be brought to the communities" (Retter, 2016, p. 15; Nord, 2015, p. 3). It is based on their history, but with a closer look into the future, it was clear for local populations that the process of Arctic exploration will not be stopped. If exploration would be completely uncontrolled, it could devastate the Arctic based on narrow-business-driven interests directly affecting indigenous populations' way of life and even their inexcusable extinction.

The Arctic Council Expansion within the Last Decade

The last decade proved to be crucial for the Arctic Council in expanding and widening its scope of activities. An important for the Council was the May 2011 'Report of Senior Arctic Officials', which included innovations toward criteria for admitting observes and further defined their role (Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) Report, 2011, pp. 50–51). The revision was the outcome of "antipathetic attitudes towards the A.C." as represented by France and China, considering joining other forums to discuss their Arctic interests (Graczyk & Koivurova, 2013, p. 6). It referred to the 'Ottawa Declaration' and supplemented rules highlighting political will, financial abilities but based on recognition of "Arctic States' sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction in the Arctic" (SAO Report, 2011, p. 50). Next to the need to update the Council about activities, the new requirement was to precisely report activities and contributions relevant to the Council work, but "no later than 120 days before the specified ministerial meeting, if they intend to continue as observers to the A.C." (SAO, 2011, p. 51; Graczyk & Koivurova, 2013, pp. 6–7). The proposed regulations were approved during the Seventh Arctic Ministerial Meeting in Nuuk, opening the door for new nations (Nuuk Declaration, 2011, p. 5). The eighth Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna adopted the Arctic Council's 'Observer Manual for Subsidiary Bodies' (with amendments) in 2013, which highlighted the exclusive rights for extension of

membership only for eight-member nations or so-called 'Arctic States.' Therefore, only those with the involvement of the Permanent Participants are in a position to make decisions. The 2013 'Observers Manual' and the new rules played a key role, as the same year Italy, Japan, India, Republic of Korea, Singapore and China joined the Arctic Council as observers; Switzerland joined in 2017 (Observers, 2020). Therefore, the significant role of Observers is participation in meetings of the Arctic Council and contribution throughout (Observers Manual, 2013, p. 13), the submission of project proposals through an Arctic State or a Permanent Participant in a collaborative manner, and the presentation of opinions on projects under development, including Working Group work plans and in-kind contributions to existing and developing projects, such as expert involvement and support. Additionally, there is an option for financial contributions to existing and developing projects. Raising funds could be achieved by subsidising a project and not exceeding the financing from the Arctic States unless otherwise transparently decided by the SAOs, and through opportunities to host project-specific, expert-level workshops or gatherings, as approved by the SAOs on a case-by-case basis.

A noteworthy accomplishment from this was the support for the creation of the Arctic Economic Council (AEC) in 2014 during the period Canadian leadership (2013–2015) as "an independent organisation that facilitates Arctic business-to-business activities and responsible economic development". It was based on a clear understanding that exploration of the Arctic will speed-up, requiring coordination within this aspect. Some NGOs criticised it as of "giving industry 'direct access to Arctic decision-makers'" and ignoring climate-related issues (Arctic Council: navigating global change, 2015, p. 2). An important meeting took place in Fairbanks, Alaska, at the end of US leadership in May 2017. During the meeting, a third important agreement facilitated by the Arctic Council was signed. The foreign ministers signed the 'Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation' to facilitate better-coordinated research aiming at a better understanding of the Arctic. 'Fairbanks Declaration 2017' concluded the meeting. 'On the Occasion of the Tenth Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council' covered specific areas of concern as the Arctic Ocean safety, economic and living conditions, climate change, and strengthening the Arctic Council (Fairbanks Declaration, 2017). In May 2017, Finland took the leadership role, and Mr. Aleksi Härkönen was selected as Chair of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs). During his inauguration, Timo Soini, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, expressed

his view about the role of organisation and the region stating,

> "In the past twenty years the Arctic Council has evolved into the main forum for Arctic issues. The Arctic Council has promoted common Arctic interests worldwide. It is my wish that we will continue to work together to foster prosperity and sustainability of Arctic people and environment. The scope of the Council's work has grown wider during the recent years. Crosscutting themes such as climate, energy, resilience and the seas have filled up the agenda. The number of projects and programs are close to one hundred. The work of the Arctic Council would benefit from a longer term strategic plan. Then the Council could decide what to focus on in the coming years" (Statement by minister Timo Soini, 2017).

Finland organised the 11th Ministerial Meeting in April 2019; among other issues, the SAOs discussed new challenges and opportunities for the organisation and ways to strengthen its influence or the region within the international community. During this year, the International Maritime Organization, already cooperating with Council, was formally granted an Observer Status to focus on search and rescue, pollution response, maritime safety, the protection of the marine environment, and "the prevention, preparedness, and handling of maritime incidents or accidents, which may involve the potential release of radioactive substances" (New Observer, 2019).

The 2019 meeting was marked by a recognition that the Trump administration approach has significantly evolved during the previous two years. Such the change was visualised by the speech of the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who stated, "This is America's moment to stand up as an Arctic nation and for the Arctic's future" and "the Arctic is at the forefront of opportunity and abundance" (LIVE, 2019; Shea, 2019). He referred specifically to Russian and Chinese actions in the Arctic and their increasing presence in the region. About the environmental aspect, Pompeo strongly highlighted that it was underestimated by other actors, especially China, and was not in line with the US focus. Such statements marked the revision of US engagement based on political, economic, and military reasons but with the understanding that there are national shortcomings requiring actions and allocation of funds. It looks as Washington will not be totally left behind others in the Arctic race. The negative signal at Rovaniemi was the US decision not to "sign the agreement over disagreements regarding global warming," causing the

United States to be seen as a "non-cooperating power" (Lee, 2019).

On 7 May 2019, Minister Soini handed over the two-year chairmanship for 2019 – 2021 period to Iceland's Foreign Minister Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson (Arctic Council Ministers Meeting, 2019), who highlighted the importance of Artic for the country as of its geographic location and impact on the economy as of fishery. Iceland's theme is 'Together Towards a Sustainable Arctic,' and its leading topics are climate and green energy solutions, the Arctic marine environment, the people and communities of the Arctic, and a more influential Arctic Council (Together towards the Sustainable Arctic, 2019). The first SAOs executive meeting in June conducted in Reykjanesbær allowed discussing priorities and ways of their implementation further. Heather Exner-Pirot, a Canadian academic, expressed a requirement toward the future as "if the Arctic Council is asking itself what it should do, it should ask whether it is doing things other organisations are doing, and whether their work helps to move the issue forward" (McGwin, 2018). The expectations toward this new strategy are high, but some, such as Bill Eichbaum, vice president of World Wildlife Fund, stated, "I'm concerned that an idea to come up with a strategic plan — and don't get me wrong, it's a good one — could turn into an excuse for doing nothing. A lot of people are comfortable with the situation," and therefore, "The Arctic Council may be small, but it has a bureaucracy, and that makes it resistant to change" (McGwin, 2018).

Conclusions

The Arctic Council is a natural successor of the AEPA, and it has further developed new programs and extended the range of nations supporting its projects to explore the region and protect its natural environment peacefully. It has been a successful endeavour; nevertheless, some ad hoc activities are based on national interests, supported by the allocation of funding. Such political and practical steps and initiatives will influence the future of Council initiatives, and it is influenced in turn by the differing perceptions of the impact of climate change among members and observers. Other factors are different positions and actions toward protecting the natural environment, especially by Russia and China, as for them, the most important issues are pragmatic interests toward exploitation of resources and the utilisation of sea lines of communication. A similar aspect is linked with companies interested in exploring for resources and fishing prospects. The environmental aspect is of great importance, as it directly affects the cohesion of

members, their interests, and even the survival of the indigenous population. The admission of new observers is making overall cooperation more complicated as the Council could harm the interest of the Arctic states, and it is already visible as, e.g., China is parallel making bilateral agreements with nations (Island, Norway) forwarding own interests. Beijing is seeing the importance of the Council and is to "elbow in if it wants to be seriously involved in Arctic affairs" to be part of decision-making processes and to forward its own agenda (Hong, 2020, chapter 3). Russia is developing military infrastructure and capabilities, and this could allow it to control the situation concerning security; this is causing a nervous reaction from the United States, Canada, and Norway. There is the potential for an arms race in this cold region to be an arena of a new Cold War; in this case, the role of the Arctic Council as the regional forum would be degraded. However, it is not to happen in the next decades, as there are other hot spots in the world causing involvement of the 'big players,' namely Russia and the United States, and even China.

Growing US interest in the region is an essential factor in the increase of national political power, economic abilities, and military capabilities, which could compete with Russian deployments seeing the geostrategic importance of the Arctic (Graczyk, 2010; Śliwa, 2014). The Report to Congress in June 2019 discussed Russian military activities and infrastructure build-up as outlined in 'the New Arctic Strategy' (Report to Congress Department of Defense Arctic Strategy, 2019, Annex A). The report supports the statements delivered by Pompeo identifying Russia and China as strategic competitors. This approach is different from previous 'peaceful' strategic documents and indicates that further investments will be made to support an Arctic policy with a closer partnership with other NATO allies. This could be linked with Robert Kagan perception of the American approach, as he linked it with the national power as "when the United States was weak, it practiced the strategies of indirection, the strategies of weakness; now that the United States is powerful, it behaves as powerful nations do" (Kagan, 2002, p. 2). The 'Report to Congress' included tasks for services including the role of Elmendorf and Eielson Air Force Bases in Alaska, the tasks of the Navy's 2nd Fleet, the Coast Guard, the Marine Corps, the US Army Alaska, and Special Operations Forces (Report to Congress, 2019, Annex A). This is an essential document as it shows the dedication of resources to meet those expectations, and it was visible by the allocation of 655 million dollars to the

Coast Guard's new polar security cutters to ensure freedom of navigation along the Northwest Passage (Madeira, 2019). Such diplomatic statements are supported by an extended program of military exercises in Alaska, and with partner nations like Norway presenting US commitment and growing readiness to secure national interests (Changes in the Arctic, 2019, pp. 67–76). This new alertness of the US administration is important for regional developments, especially as other nations, especially Russia, are already far ahead in the Arctic race in developing infrastructure and capabilities. It is crucial not only for Washington in parallel, but it is also of immense importance for its allies and partners in the Arctic region as the United States possesses the required instruments of power to affect the overall balance of the competition (Huebert, 2019, p. 4).

The specificity of the Arctic Council was recognised as an exceptional place for cooperation as a "forum wherein all eight member states acknowledge and appreciate the impacts of climate change on human society and the environment, and are working in a united manner to mitigate and adapt to its consequences" (Finne, 2018). An international group of some 60 academics nominated it for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018 as an example of the successful integration of many entities within dialogue and cooperation. In the context of its nomination, relations with Russia are an example of cooperation allowing "Arctic states together to address emergency maritime response and combined operations in the Arctic at a time when all other military and defense cooperation was suspended" (Quinn, 2018). There is still potential for further development of the Arctic Council regarding the growing recognition of possible profits related to rediscovering the Arctic. It is an imperative factor for nations and global companies to look for new profit opportunities; therefore, there is a constant need for information about the region, and the Council allows them all to follow developments along with an opportunity to contribute.

The Arctic Council has existed already for more than twenty years, and it has continuously been considering the revision and adaptation of the strategic goals of the organisation within its legislative documents; this work was evident during the period of Finnish leadership. The documents are still under development, and consultations among states to ensure a general cohesion of opinions on what should be the main effort in the coming years are still ongoing. The joint strategy is essential, as lead nations are changing every two years and some are in a position to push their priorities, but it "makes it difficult to focus on the most

demanding issues or to maintain progress on any one of them" (Finne, 2018). Such documents have supported the progress in environmental and maritime domains, as the 'Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation' presents options for further close cooperation. This is critically important, as the impact of climate change on the Arctic influences the whole region in many ways, demanding consolidated studies and actions. The organisation currently has quite a number of observers, and it influences the actions of Working Groups in the bilateral and multilateral agreements among members. The Arctic Council requires a clear distinction between individual national goals and the common goals of all entities to create a real climate for cooperation to preserve peaceful cooperation in the Arctic. From a pragmatic point of view, cooperation is essential for common success, but this is not easy to achieve in a situation where there is a lot of to be gained by all the actors; this is the case of the Arctic and its somewhat unpredictable future. There is, however, the potential for conflicting interests, but the military clash is still not predicted, as it is against the attentiveness of nations involved. The growing access to resources will open new options, and it could be a trigger for more antagonistic behaviours. In this context, the Council is following the positive role in international relations, but the realism approach must be taken into consideration in the future as "the anarchical nature of the international system predisposes states to behave in certain ways" (Byers and Sinclair, 2006, p. 6) constrained by "anarchy and egoism" (Donnelly, 2005, p. 52).

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