

Russian Arctic Politics After 2010

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Geir Hønneland

*Arctic Politics, the Law of the Sea and Russian identity:
The Barents Sea Delimitation Agreement in Russian Public Debate. Basingstoke:
Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 212p.*

Geir Hønneland, research director at Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Norway, has written extensively on international relations in the European North, Barents Sea fisheries, and Russian-Norwegian relations in the Arctic. His book *Arctic Politics, the Law of the Sea and Russian identity* is a collection of articles based on media analysis and Hønneland's long experience of cooperation with Russians. Hønneland says in the preface that the book is a revised and extended version of his previous book *Hvordan skal Putin ta Barentshavet tilbake?* [What can Putin do to take the Barents Sea back?], published in Norwegian in 2013 (Akademika). His idea was to analyse the shift in Russia's politics after the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev (2008–2012), given that Medvedev was the president who signed the delimitation agreement with Norway in 2010. The treaty created vehement debate and opposition in Russia, not least among local fishery organizations and trade unions from Northwest Russia, who criticized the treaty for not protecting the rights of Russian fisheries. Hønneland's main thesis is to show "that the agreement's critics and proponents both inscribe themselves into different Russian narratives of Russia's rightful place in the world" (p. 8).

Hønneland started his career as an interpreter for the Norwegian Coast Guard and fisheries authorities (p. 6). In this position he got acquainted with the Joint Norwegian-Soviet Fisheries Commission, established in 1976. The second chapter of the book leans on his work in the coastguard vessels in the Barents Sea. Hønneland thus examines the Barents Sea jurisdiction and fisheries management with Russia, focusing especially on the Svalbard treaty and the problems it has caused. Namely, the 200-mile fisheries pro-

tection zone around Svalbard is not a clearly defined category under the Law of the Sea. Geir Hønneland does not confine himself to the Delimitation Agreement alone, but also tackles relations between Russia and the West. His is using an interesting approach, including media analysis, his own experiences, and interviews (some dating to his previous book). Hønneland approaches the Russia–West relations through the history of Westernizers and “introverts”, which refers to the slavophile tradition and the Eurasian movement. He claims that contemporary Russian foreign policy follows the main cleavages in Russian intellectual history (p. 78).

The other side of the coin is the everyday perspective to the reactions of Russia and Russians to cooperation with the West (in this case Norway). Chapter five is based on Hønneland’s book *Borderland Russians: Identity, narrative and international relations* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013). Here he examines the narrative resources that ordinary Northwest Russians use when they speak about themselves as northerners, as opposed to Russian southerners or Scandinavians. Hønneland refers to the “region building” of the Barents area from the early 1990s, which aimed at creating a common political region without borders and cultural differences (p. 87). The “region building” project, to put it mildly, came to grief, but fostered Hønneland’s interest in studying the identities of the North. The interviews included in this chapter were done in Murmansk already in 2004. They may be few in number, but the interviews give an interesting perspective to the Russians’ narrative juggling (p. 103) in the Kola Peninsula. All the same, I found this chapter too loosely connected with the delimitation treaty and the discussion around it.

As a whole, Hønneland’s book provides valuable insights into the delimitation agreement, Russian foreign policy, and Russian identity. The management of Norwegian and Russian fisheries and the process leading to the signing of the delimitation treaty make interesting reading for observers also outside Norway. Russian reactions to the treaty are intriguing and may reveal something about Russian identity, but I sometimes found it difficult to follow the text, as it was not obvious whether the text or quotation came from a newspaper, interview, or scholarly literature. The topic of Geir Hønneland’s book is nevertheless current in many ways. Since the re-annexation of Crimea to Russia, the narratives of Russia–West relations have changed drastically. There is Russia’s renewed continental shelf submission to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea UNCLOS – representing juridical and peaceful cooperation in the Arctic – but there is also the Western concern about Russia’s growing military presence in the Arctic.

Arctic Politics, the Law of the Sea and Russian identity is a welcome contribution to all those who wish to know more about the local aspects of the cooperation in the Arctic and to gain some more background into the current situation. The Barents Sea delimitation treaty and the long process may not be very well-known outside Norway. I recommend this book to all students and scholars interested in the Barents region and the control over the Arctic seas.

