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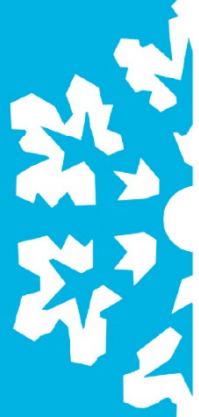
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ArCticles

THE EU'S NEW ARCTIC COMMUNICATION: NOT-SO-INTEGRATED, NOT- SO-DISAPPOINTING?



AN INTEGRATED
EUROPEAN UNION POLICY
FOR THE ARCTIC



THE EU'S NEW ARCTIC COMMUNICATION: NOT-SO-INTEGRATED, NOT-SO-DISAPPOINTING?

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3 May 2016

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This analysis is simultaneously published as a series of three commentaries by The Arctic Institute, Centre for Circumpolar Security Studies at www.thearcticinstitute.org. The authors are most grateful to Katbrin Keil and Greg Sharp from The Arctic Institute and Małgorzata Śmieszek from the Arctic Centre for their valuable comments and suggestions.

ArCticles is a series of entries by Arctic Centre staff relating to current Arctic issues, published by the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland. The responsibility for the views expressed rests with the authors.

Cover Photo: European Commission (HR Federica Mogherini, on the left, and Commissioner Karmenu Vella)

INTRODUCTION

On 27 April 2016, Federica Mogherini (the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) and Karmenu Vella (Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries) presented the third take – following the earlier statements from 2008 and 2012 (European Commission 2008; 2012) – on the EU-Arctic nexus. The new [Joint Communication](#) is titled “An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic”. The new policy statement was requested by the Council of the European Union in 2014 and was preceded – for the first time – by a consultation process. The document provides a broad overview of various aspects of EU presence in the Arctic region. It proposes also a few – albeit not particularly many – ideas for future actions. The document does so within three “priority areas”:

- Climate Change and Safeguarding the Arctic Environment;
- Sustainable Development in and around the Arctic;
- International Cooperation on Arctic Issues.

In this ArCticle – the first of the new Arctic Centre series – we provide our perspective on a few elements that are novel and particularly interesting. The Communication proclaims itself to be a proposal for an “integrated EU Arctic policy”. We therefore discuss what an “integrated policy” could mean in the EU context and ask whether it is possible to “integrate” the diverse fields of EU-Arctic affairs. Further, we turn to the aspects that point to an on-going change in the EU’s approach to the Arctic: an increased focus on the development of the European Arctic, as well as the proposed coordination of the EU Arctic-related funding, which also entails enhanced stakeholder engagement. Finally, we discuss the external dimension of the EU’s Arctic policy and

its location in the broader circumpolar setting of Arctic cooperation and the Union’s upcoming Global Strategy.

We leave the analysis of the Union’s engagement in climate mitigation and adaptation, research, and the EU’s position on Arctic maritime shipping and hydrocarbon extractions to others. We do so because these aspects changed little in the new Communication as compared to previous policy statements.

I. DECONSTRUCTING “INTEGRATED”: THE NATURE OF THE “EU ARCTIC POLICY” AND ITS LIMITS

The new Arctic Communication is supposed to set the stage for an “integrated EU Arctic policy.” If taking the common understanding of the word “integrated” - making the policy more than just a sum of its many parts -, this policy is not delivering. Considering the nature of the cross-cutting Arctic policy—of marginal interest to the EU—we claim it is highly unlikely that this document will lead to enhanced coherence and integration. This is even more true as the Arctic, until recently considered geo-economically ‘hot’, may not be that attractive anymore due to low oil and other commodity prices such as minerals, as well as the sluggish rise in Arctic shipping (Humpert 2014; SADA 2014; Käpylä and Mikkola 2015). However, if assessed against other standards than “integration,” the EU’s perception of its place in the Arctic and its focus show a few clear signs of progress.

Before we get too excited: words without meaning

In May 2014, the Council of the European Union—the EU institution that brings together representatives of the 28 EU member states—requested the European Commission and High Representative (HR) to work towards “further development of an integrated and coherent Arctic Policy” (Council of the European Union 2014). The new Communication was therefore meant to develop the EU’s Arctic policy as an integrated one, and it dutifully does so in the title

and throughout the text. However, despite these references, the policy update lacks a proper definition of what “integrated” actually means in the EU-Arctic context. To be blunt, even the academic community of EU (foreign) policy researchers tends to accept commonly used catchphrases such as “integrated,” “coherent,” or “overarching” without scrutinizing what stands behind these policy slogans.

Earlier, the authors of this analysis (Stepień and Raspotnik 2015) identified constraints for formulating a coherent and comprehensive framework governing diverse aspects of the EU’s presence in the Arctic. To put it simply, the scope and number of Arctic-relevant issues is too broad, their diversity too great and the position of Arctic affairs in EU policymaking too marginal for a coherent policy to emerge, i.e. one that produces synergies (with different Arctic-relevant actions supporting one another) between different Arctic-relevant actions. And the idea of “integration” could indicate an even more ambitious policy undertaking, making Arctic policy something more than just a sum of its parts. The challenge arises from the very nature of the EU Arctic policy, which incorporates a diversity of both internal and external issues. We focus on the former in Part II (p. 8) and on the latter in Part III (p. 14) of this analysis.

Integrated into one: a single Arctic policy?

Policy integration occurs in at least three varieties. First, integration can mean bringing different sectors together to form a single policy guided by one set of objectives. That has been attempted in fields such as rural policy (e.g., Jordan and Halpin 2006), youth policy or the EU’s Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP). The latter is particularly instructive. Although analysts have often criticized that fisheries, environmental policy, maritime transport, regional development, and offshore energy still

go their own ways, some progress towards bringing these policies closer to one another has been achieved. This is due to the application of common principles and concrete instruments, mainly the ecosystem approach and maritime spatial planning. The ecosystem approach has indeed started to filter into sectoral policy-making, in particular with regards to fisheries, the environment and—to a lesser extent—regional development. Integrated maritime spatial planning is a slow process but, induced through EU legislation (Directive 2014/89/EU), it makes a difference throughout European seas. In contrast to these examples, the Arctic policy is not likely to lead to that type of integration. Creating a single policy out of the EU's various Arctic-relevant sectors seems hardly feasible. This does not seem to be the intention of EU policymakers. As a matter of fact, in the 2016 policy update, the Commission and the HR no longer talk about common Arctic policy objectives (which would guide action in all components of Arctic policy). These are now called - appropriately - “priority areas”; basically, aspects, not goals, of EU presence in the Arctic:

- Climate change and safeguarding the Arctic environment
- Sustainable development in and around the Arctic
- International cooperation on Arctic issues

Integrated into sectoral policies: mainstreaming Arctic issues?

The second type of policy integration relates to cross-cutting issues feeding into various sectors of state or EU activity. The most obvious case for this is environmental and climate policy integration (Lafferty and Hovden 2003; Mickwitz et al. 2010). Over the last decades – at

least in the EU and many of its member states – environmental issues and climate policy targets have indeed found their way into such fields as transport, agriculture, fisheries, and regional development.

Could Arctic issues be integrated into wider sectoral policymaking in a similar fashion? Perhaps. The Joint Communication is not a definite statement of the EU's policy towards the Arctic as it - in principle - is to inform other EU institutions on the position of the Commission and the HR. Nonetheless, it can be considered as an authoritative guidance to Commission services and it is likely to be endorsed by the Council. The text of the 2016 Communication states that “[t]his policy document should guide the EU's actions for the coming years”. However, the marginal character of the EU's Arctic policy in the broader European policy framework makes it rather challenging for Arctic-specific concerns to noticeably affect the course of EU policy-making in sectors such as environmental policy, agriculture, fisheries, transport or strategies for resource supply. Single cases exist where Arctic policy did indeed have some influence. From the dawn of the EU's Arctic-focused policymaking, the Arctic started to pop-up in different contexts, from mineral resources and energy (e.g. Directive 2013/30/EU on safety of offshore oil and gas operations, referring to promotion of international standards for Arctic hydrocarbons extraction), to maritime traffic legislation (e.g. Directive 2009/17/EC on vessel traffic monitoring and information systems, referring to ice conditions). As another example, the Northern Periphery Programme became the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme in 2014, albeit this was primarily a case of relabelling than actual change.

As a matter of fact, the policy statement provides some possibilities for further integration of Arctic issues. One example is the option of including protecting the Central Arctic Ocean into the EU's position in the currently

commencing UN negotiations on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction or the high seas. Another example is a possible – although difficult to implement—adjustment in the EU’s definition of key transport networks to support transport connections on the Europe’s North-South axis have been assessed as underdeveloped. Moreover, the proposed forum and network for national and regional authorities from European Arctic and managing authorities of EU programs (see Part II), which shall support EU Arctic funding cooperation—could lead to adjustments in the future set-up of EU structural funding. However, examples of proposals to mainstream Arctic issues into broader, pan-EU decision-making processes are few and uncertain as regards implementation.

Integrated “laundry list”: Building on the EU’s general policies?

The third way to understand “integrated policy” concerns the policy itself that could eventually be integrated into existing frameworks, policies and activities. EU policymakers sometimes seem to apply this line of thinking, as shown in their analysis of the added value of macro-regional strategies (European Commission 2013). Simply, an integrated policy would mean here one that builds on and takes account of principles and objectives of general sectoral policies (like climate, environment, transport or regional development).

To some extent, this is exactly what the new Arctic Communication does. We learn that EU activities in the Arctic will be in line with EU climate mitigation and adaptation policies or the EU Maritime Security Strategy from 2014. The expected evolution of the EU’s overall cohesion policy towards greater focus on investment loans might lead to a decrease of funding available for the European Arctic regions

through regional and cross-border programmes (e.g., Janson 2016), showing how dependent the EU’s actions in the Arctic are on its overall policy frameworks.

The result is that the Communication – similarly to its predecessor – remains a set of “statements of fact rather than commitments to action, which appear to be in great part a continuation or intensification of existing activities at EU, bilateral or multilateral level”, as Airoidi (2014) concluded at the previous 2012 Joint Communication. The 2016 document largely constitutes a list numerous activities, studies, and projects that have already taken place and provides fairly few examples of actions yet to be taken: from existing satellite technologies, through on-going operation of the [EU-Polarnet](#) (formulating the European Polar Research Programme), to very specific projects to be continued, like the development of multi-resolution maps of the Arctic seabed. Proposals for future activities are few. The Communication is certainly not an action plan.



Infographic: European Commission, Twitter #EUArctic

The EU Arctic policy as “anything that gets to be implemented”

The so-called “EU Arctic policy” is in fact a policy on “anything that gets to be implemented”. Eventually, we should perhaps accept it as such – as an overview of the EU’s Arctic-relevant policies and actions – and thus, limit our expectations boosted by the Commission/HR’s claim of establishing an “integrated policy”, a policy that is something more than just a sum of its parts.

The primary role of the Communication is not to streamline EU Arctic policies and actions but to communicate the scope of the EU’s presence in the region, to show that the Union has an appropriate understanding of the situation in the region and to state overall principles that the EU commits to follow in its diverse Arctic activities. The key audiences are the Arctic states, EU member states, and to some extent the general public. Neumann (2007) famously asked “why diplomats never produce anything new”, suggesting that diplomatic statements are about diplomats communicating with one another with the assumption that all relevant issues need to be mentioned, with one common voice and emphasis upheld. While the EU Arctic communication is not exactly an external relations statement – it cuts across external and internal affairs – it also has to incorporate all possible Arctic-relevant issues. That is because not mentioning something would become a statement in itself.

As a result, the Communication’s authors had little choice but to present an ever longer list of Arctic-relevant aspects of EU activity: research, resources, sustainable development, dialogue with Indigenous Peoples, Arctic Council as a primary forum for circumpolar cooperation, UNCLOS as a key legal framework for Arctic Ocean, etc. Considering the number of aspects

brought under the umbrella of the EU Arctic policy, limiting many aspects to being just mentioned - resulting in the document looking like a long “laundry list” (Østhagen 2013) - is perhaps a blessing as more substance would turn the Communication into a 200-page-long report.

Limits to the EU’s influence

The lack of policy integration is coupled with the Commission’s and the HR/European External Action Service’s (EEAS) understanding of the limits on the EU’s ability to influence developments that are important in and for the Arctic. The EU can only “encourage” its international partners to speedily ratify the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Ballast Water Convention, both yet to enter into force. Moreover, it can only urge Arctic states to effectively implement the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (although the dialogue with China would be rather important from an Arctic perspective), where the EU itself has done a relatively good job (DG Environment website). What is missing in this list of encouragements is any call for limiting the use of heavy fuel oil in the Arctic, a measure that has not found its way into the mandatory Polar Code. This is strongly opposed by Russia, as the country is concerned about the costs of operating its domestic Arctic destination shipping. Despite declaring a “duty to protect the Arctic environment” and being a “global leader in science”—two essential components that aim to highlight the Union’s Arctic credibility—the EU is a secondary participant to many Arctic institutions and attempts to tread carefully as to not offend Arctic states. Unfortunately, too often the fundamental question as to how the EU could encourage its partners or facilitate developments is unanswered in the 2016 Joint Communication.

Summary

In conclusion, it is difficult to imagine that EU officials who specifically deal with Arctic issues can formulate a strong cross-cutting framework, let alone make a significant impact on larger processes taking place in the EU. Considering that an integrated Arctic policy is a rather unlikely creature, perhaps it is time for the EU to issue Arctic statements on more specific issues. What is the role of the Arctic region in the Union's implementation of the Paris Agreement? What are the implications for the EU's Arctic-relevant activities stemming from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, relevant in principle for the whole world and mentioned in the new Communication? Is it possible to have a policy statement focused on the European Arctic - perhaps as an outcome of the European Arctic Stakeholder Forum process - as a part of the new framework for the regional policy in the next EU budgeting period 2021-2027?

Although the EU's Arctic policy will to a great extent remain a mere listing of EU Arctic-relevant activities, it certainly does not mean that it is irrelevant. It is important as a way of communicating EU Arctic activities and general principles the EU and its institutions acknowledge. The process of drafting a communication also makes EU officials reflect on the EU's overall place in the region (Stepień 2015). Eventually, the new document does propose some more concrete outputs regarding European Arctic affairs and possibilities for future coordination within the EU institutions, as well as coordination of various sources of EU Arctic funding.

II. MAKING A DIFFERENCE: THE EUROPEAN ARCTIC AND BETTER COORDINATION

The new Joint Communication includes several aspects that show further change in thinking about the Arctic in the EU's headquarters in Brussels. While the general statements on climate, Arctic Ocean-related affairs and international cooperation have remained largely unaltered over the years, the increased focus on the European Arctic and finding ways to enhance coordination of Arctic-relevant EU actions are signs of change. First, the European Arctic regions and their development have been finally given a prominent place. Second, as regards economic development, greater attention is paid to a broad range of new sectors and opportunities rather than to overblown expectations of hydrocarbon or minerals extraction or maritime shipping. In the context of the European Arctic, extractive industries practically disappeared from the purview of the new policy statement. Third, the EU proposes some concrete measures to coordinate its Arctic-relevant funding. Enhancing intra-institutional coordination within the Council and the European Parliament (EP) is also proposed. The Communication reveals future risks related to a possible shift in the EU's regional funding and to relative silence on environmental questions in discussion on economic development in the European Arctic. Also, concerning the economic development in the European Arctic, the indigenous - that is primarily Sámi - perspective is virtually absent.

More European and more economic development-focused policy

One of the most visible changes in comparison to the [2012 Communication](#) (European Commission 2012) is the place of Europe's northernmost regions and their closest neighbourhood in the reflection on the EU's role in the Arctic. European Arctic issues have now fully become an integral component of what the EU considers as its Arctic affairs. One of the main points of criticism concerning previous Arctic policy initiatives was the policy's geographic orientation towards the broader circumpolar North and maritime Arctic. There were calls for a stronger focus on (sub-)Arctic areas that are closer to Europe's centre (Østhagen & Raspotnik 2015; Stepień et al. 2014), including calls coming from the Europe's northernmost regions (NSPA 2015). One could argue that it is the European North that could be the EU's gateway into the Arctic and not the tedious and long-lasting discussions on Arctic Council observer status (Keil & Raspotnik 2013).

Sustainable development remains the central concept in the EU policy, in line with a maxim that one can make any issue good by putting the word sustainable in front of it. Sustainability is now also fashionably coupled with "resilience", which appears throughout the document. Referring to "sustainable development" rather than the protection or utilization of the Arctic has also become an imperative when publicly and politically discussing the future of the Arctic region, especially for actors considered external to the region (Raspotnik & Østhagen 2014). "Sustainable development" circumvents accusations that the EU wants to turn the Arctic

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Infographic: European Commission, Twitter #EUArctic

into a national park and that its interest is solely in exploiting northern riches. Thus, the new document includes an assurance that sustainable development should be pursued “taking into account both the traditional livelihoods of those living in the region and the impact of economic development on the Arctic's fragile environment.”

While the Communication's paragraphs that refer to the Circumpolar Arctic appear to show a stronger environmental focus, those on the European Arctic define “sustainable development in and around the Arctic” primarily as “sustainable economic

development” and “sustainable innovation”. There is a new emphasis on the role of non-extractive sectors and new technologies, but growth and investments are the key catchphrases. This mirrors the overall approach of the Juncker Commission, i.e. one focused on jobs, growth and investment.

Innovative Europe's northernmost regions?

In the 2012 Joint Communication the main concern was “the sustainable use of resources” with other economic activities treated as supplementary. In the 2016 statement, the shift to the European Arctic combined with the less optimistic outlook for large-scale energy, mineral and transport developments leads to a reversal of the earlier focus, with a broader notion of (sustainable) multifaceted economic development moving to central position. Extractive industries are hardly mentioned, and if they are, it is mostly in the context of international cooperation. Instead, much space is given to innovation, prospects of small and medium enterprises, connectivity, bioeconomy, information technologies, renewable energy, and cold-climate technologies. This closely reflects the current discussion on the prospects for regional development in Northern Fennoscandia (Lapland Chamber of Commerce 2016).

The new document looks at the European Arctic in two different ways: from the European perspective and from the Arctic perspective. The former refers to the European northernmost regions, depicting the regions as peripheral and disadvantaged. This perspective could lead to securing much cherished special allocation within structural funding – an allocation the northernmost regions have so far enjoyed due to their permanent structural and climatic handicaps in comparison to other parts of the EU (Janson 2016). Improving the northernmost regions' access to the EU's single market – partly through digital solutions – is another sign of the appreciation for challenges of peripherality.

The accessibility of the region could be also improved through hard infrastructure, such as through North-South transport connections. While the latter is merely hinted at in the new



Arctic railway proposal between Gulf of Bothnia, Finnish Lapland and the Arctic Ocean. Source: Arctic corridor at www.arcticcorridor.fi

Communication, it brings some hope to Finnish dreams of a railway between Southern Lapland and the Arctic Ocean. (Hope if you are a municipality official or mining industry representative, fear if you are a Sámi reindeer herder from North-East Finnish Lapland.) It remains to be seen whether funding opportunities are reflected in the upcoming EU seven-year budget perspective, where net contributors to the EU budget – like Sweden – push for cutting the Union's budget. It is also to be seen whether any funding for infrastructural projects – if materialized – would be supported at least in a small part by direct funding (Connecting Europe Facility or European Regional Development Fund) or rather by investment loans.

However, the perception of the northernmost European regions changes when we look at them from the perspective of the circumpolar Arctic: from this point of view the European Arctic is not peripheral but comparatively rich, well-connected and highly innovative. In this reading, the region could be central to

development of (ideally cleaner) technologies, know-how, and environmentally sustainable technological solutions for activities in the Arctic. The Communication embraces these ideas with references to cold-climate solutions, the development of “Arctic standards” for processes and technologies, emphasis on northern SMEs, collaborative (sharing) economy and circular economy (growth decoupled from extraction of new resources). The latter are in fact new EU-wide hip policy phrases. Such a new (as seen from Brussels) way of thinking of the developmental potential of European Arctic regions is particularly strongly present also in Finland’s Strategy for the Arctic region (Prime Minister’s Office 2013) and various reports discussing Finnish and Nordic Arctic affairs (Lipponen 2015; Husebekk et al. 2015; Olsen et al. 2016). There, Arctic and cold-climate solutions are to become one of the drivers for regional and national growth. This emerging coherence of EU, national and local priorities is certainly a welcome development.

A major change in general EU policies - of great importance for the European Arctic - is the expected shift from structural funding towards investment financing. For instance, the new document points to the European Investment Bank (EIB) as a source for funding for Fennoscandian cross-border projects.



Corina Crețu, EU Commissioner for Regional Policy meeting Esko Lotvonen, Mayor of Rovaniemi, following EU Citizen's Dialogue in Rovaniemi, 16.02.2016. Source: EC Audiovisual Services

If after 2020 the EU financial support shifts further towards investment financing (and it currently appears rather likely), one possibility to consider for the EU could be to secure dedicated loan facilities for European Arctic projects, as they may often lose the competition for such resources to Europe’s economic and technology powerhouses, located to the south. An example is the Nordic Investment Bank, which has recently established an [Arctic Financing Facility](#), dedicating EUR 500 million exclusively for “high north projects” (NIB website). A similar small, targeted programme within the EIB could be considered, but the Communication makes no such proposal. Instead, every time the support of the EU investment mechanisms is mentioned in the Communication, the ominous phrase “could help” appears, this telling European Arctic actors: “there are pan-European loans and funds available, so try to fund your needs from these sources”.

While it is appreciable that the Commission tries to find ways for making northernmost regions more economically viable and less reliant on extractive industries and support from the south, perhaps it is high time to openly acknowledge that the character of northern, sparsely populated regions requires a certain on-going degree of support from Brussels and national capitals in terms of infrastructure, service-provision, and the maintenance of living standards in the North. That does not mean that these regions cannot be innovative and produce added value for the rest of Europe and the Circumpolar Arctic. However, national and European expectations that remote parts of the continent become self-reliant and economically resilient – which stems from the language of the Joint Communication – may push regional and local policy-makers in the North to ultimately rely on extractive industries and sacrificing environmental concerns, in contradiction to EU policy priorities.

Enhancing coordination and engagement?

The most concrete output of the new Communication are new frameworks for better coordination of the EU's Arctic activities. Creating such venues for coordination was called for by some European Arctic stakeholders, as well as the authors of this piece (Stepien et al. 2014; Stępień and Raspotnik 2015).

First, a temporary forum – called misleadingly “European Arctic stakeholder forum” – for “enhancing collaboration between different EU funding programmes” is to be established. It could be considered a direct result of the Council's 2014 conclusions and the 2014-2015 [consultations](#) on streamlining EU Arctic funding.

Composed of national (open also to Greenland, Iceland and Norway), regional and local authorities, the new forum will attempt to define “key investment and research priorities” for EU funds by the end of 2017. The forum will be complemented by a network of managing authorities and stakeholders from various EU programmes. It is unclear how these processes are to relate to the EU-Polarnet project, which works on European Polar research priorities, also through a broad stakeholder engagement. A certain degree of overlap regarding the research dimension seems unavoidable. Moreover, participation of indigenous peoples and their organizations - chiefly the Sámi and the Greenlandic Inuit - in the new forums is not mentioned. This is disturbing as the communication brings up the question of North-South transport infrastructure or renewable energy projects, and not all of the projects currently considered are seen favourably by indigenous representatives.

It is somewhat disappointing that funding fora are to be temporary in nature, but in the current state of a semi-permanent crisis in the EU, it is a miracle that they are at all considered. After 2017, the envisaged annual Arctic stakeholder conference – perhaps similar to those taking place in macro-regions like the Baltic or the Atlantic – may serve as the continuation of the European Arctic Stakeholder Forum's work.

Bringing different EU programmes together is something that has been proposed by various actors and analysts for some years. In light of limited EU resources that currently mainly facilitate networking or support smaller projects, exploring possibilities for pulling together resources into joint calls is indeed one of the possible outputs of the proposed coordination fora. In light of the envisaged emphasis on investment financing, the role of the EIB in these coordination frameworks may be of key importance.

Second, while not mentioned in the Communication, the Commission has started to look for a partner to implement something dubbed “EU Arctic Policy Dialogue and Outreach” (EC Ted website). It includes organizing several major events with Arctic stakeholders in Brussels and the North. How such a process would look like specifically, what sort of stakeholders it would involve and what impact it could have on the development of the EU Arctic policy is so far unknown.

Third, the Communication concludes with proposals for establishing a Working Party on Arctic Matters and Northern Cooperation in the Council and a similar delegation in the European Parliament. In the diverse EU-Arctic nexus and in light of the complexity of the EU itself, more long-lasting platforms for exchanging ideas and information are welcome. However, the marginal character of Arctic policy in the EU suggests that these coordination venues – if ever established – are unlikely to host particularly energetic debates.

One disappointing feature is the EU policymakers' weak engagement with indigenous peoples and local Arctic inhabitants regarding EU Arctic-relevant activities. The text of the Communication pushes indigenous peoples' issues into the "dialogue" corner, rather than raising up their specific concerns throughout the various policy fields discussed in the document. That is not uncommon as indigenous affairs are often constrained in policy debates and documents to what is considered local and traditional, thereby limiting indigenous influence on major political decision-making. Ideally, the overarching EU Arctic policy-making could have as one of its key contributions creating spaces for engaging Arctic actors who are likely to be marginalized in broader EU decision-making processes. In particular, the role of the only Arctic indigenous people inhabiting EU territory, the Sámi is not highlighted at all, and it would be fairly natural to consider indigenous perspectives when discussing innovation, SMEs, renewables or bioeconomy. For instance, young indigenous entrepreneurs and nature-based industries are seen as key vehicles for viable indigenous communities.

In a more circumpolar context, annual Arctic Dialogue meetings are mentioned and they have been appreciated by Arctic indigenous organizations, but concrete outputs of this format have been so far hardly visible. Furthermore, the EU is traditionally rather silent on engagement with other Arctic inhabitants than indigenous peoples. Perhaps the EU Arctic Policy Dialogue and Outreach process could fill this gap.

Summary

In sum, we can see the evolution of the EU's Arctic policy towards a greater focus on the challenges specific to the European Arctic. There are also some concrete proposals for a better coordination of EU Arctic-relevant funding and inter-sectoral communication within EU institutions (the Council and the EP).

But the Communication reveals also potentially problematic aspects of the EU's future engagement in the North. First, environmental issues are hidden behind sustainability and innovation language, which obscures real dilemmas and value choices that need to be made in Europe's northern localities that experience structural and demographic challenges. Many actors in the region still hope for (and many fear) possible expansion of extractive sectors in the future. The Communication's silence on hydrocarbons and minerals will not make these dilemmas go away. Also, innovation cannot be presented as an easy answer to every challenge, value conflict or contradiction. Second, the focus on investment financing can lead to limiting direct programme support for structurally disadvantaged regions in the future. The first problematic aspect will remain with us for decades to come, the second is likely to become a battleground in the coming years, both in Brussels and in the North.

III. WHAT ABOUT ARCTIC COOPERATION? A SMALL EU FISH IN A BIG ARCTIC POND

In the last part of our analysis of the EU's new Communication on Arctic matters we focus on the international and global dimension of the new statement. Hence, we ask how the EU sees its place and role in pan-Arctic cooperation.

Safe and Stable – European Neighbourhoods and a Global Strategy

According to the Communication's very first paragraph, a "safe, stable, sustainable and prosperous Arctic is important (...) for the European Union", with the Union having a "strategic interest in playing a key role in the Arctic region". Why is it so important for the EU that the Arctic region remains a "zone of peace, prosperity and constructive international cooperation"?

The functionality of the European Union is determined by its various neighbourhoods and frontier areas. Instability, chaos and/or unpredictability in these regions significantly influence the Union's internal stability, posing challenges to the very existence of the Union as such. At the moment, the migration and refugee crisis along Europe's southern borders serves as a constant reminder of how external threats are having a lasting and distressing impact on the EU's internal stability. In a nutshell, in today's post-Cold War environment, internal and external elements of security and stability are inextricably linked. Hence, it is in Europe's very own interests to create neighbourhoods of stability and predictability.

From a conceptual perspective, adopted security strategies provide the framework that identify a particular security environment, key challenges and related policy implications. With the last [European Security Strategy](#) (ESS) (European Council 2003) already 13 years old, the HR is currently developing a new [Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy](#) that should guide the EU's global action in the future. Unlike the ESS, the new Global Strategy will also cover the Arctic and the essential question how to deepen and reinforce the prevailing cooperative relationships in the region (Raspotnik 2016).

Additionally, the EU's approach to the Arctic can be seen in light of the 2014 [Maritime Security Strategy](#) (Council 2014). Accordingly, security has been understood in a broad manner that also encompasses environmental security. Arctic waters are mentioned as an area of particular importance, alongside the EU's adjacent seas and the Atlantic Ocean. Following EU interests, the Union commits to "maritime multilateralism", i.e. cooperation with all interested parties. The mutual respect of international law and rules is considered key in this regard. The new Arctic Communication mirrors this approach, stating that the EU will engage "in a strategic dialogue with Arctic stakeholders and third countries on security matters and by promoting continued rules-based governance at sea".

The Northern Neighbourhood

Over the last decade, the Arctic region turned from an allegedly geopolitically and geoeconomically 'hot' Arctic into a realistically 'cold' Arctic (Stepien & Raspotnik 2015). Initially, the region's volatile state of affairs had been characterised as a state of chaos, dominated by the competition over natural resources and maritime routes with states facing each other in a Wild West style (e.g. Zellen 2009). This perception of the Arctic – Europe's northern

frontier – led to an increased interest in Arctic affairs within the hallways of EU power. Ever since 2008, the EU’s various institutional actors – the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament – have published policy documents that outlined the different ideas about the EU-Arctic nexus. Interdependence was key to all of these seven documents. The Arctic does not only affect Europe but is essentially also affected by Europe. Climate change in the Arctic does not originate in the circumpolar North but has its causes in the industrialised regions of the world. In turn, climate change in the Arctic does not end at the Arctic Circle but magnifies global climate change.

The New Communication and Arctic Cooperation

The emphasis on mutual interdependence between the EU and the Arctic region also characterises the new Joint Communication on “An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic”. Not least, one of the functions of the EU’s Arctic policy is to serve as a regional sub-policy for the Union’s broader strategic outlook

as it is going to be presented in the Global Strategy (Raspotnik 2016).

The policy paper starts from the premise that although the Arctic states have a primary responsibility for addressing issues within their territories, many Arctic challenges can be more effectively addressed through regional or multilateral cooperation. Unsurprisingly, the Communication mentions the usual suspects in that regard and emphasises the now-established ‘same old’ cooperative and engaged position of the EU towards the following governance frameworks:

- The Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) provides a framework to manage the Arctic, and the EU will seek strategic dialogue with both Arctic stakeholders and third countries to ensure compliance with the Convention;
- The Arctic Council is the primary forum for regional cooperation and the EU will continue to engage in all niches and corners of the Arctic Council (and eventually become an accredited observer), in addition hoping that the Finnish chairmanship “will offer an opportunity to bring European ideas and initiatives” to its work;
- The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Union’s very own Northern Dimension, the Nordic Council and the UN Economic



Arctic Council's Senior Arctic Officials' meeting in Yellowknife, NWT, Canada, 26 March 2014. Clear division between Arctic states and permanent participants (at the table) and observers in the back. Image credit: Arctic Council Secretariat / Linnea Nordström

Commission for Europe on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution are also important regional cooperation frameworks that continue to be supported by the EU.

Additionally, the Joint Communication stresses the Union's engagement in issues of direct relevance to the Arctic at international level, particularly via the United Nations. For example, a EU Arctic policy is considered an "important element" in implementing the [COP 21 agreement](#) (Paris Agreement).

Ocean Governance and Fisheries

The EU's approach towards the international framework for the Arctic Ocean needs to be discussed in the broader context of the Union's current process of formulating its approach to [international ocean governance](#). The key venue for EU action will be the UN negotiations on a possible new UNCLOS implementing agreement covering biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (high seas), which are commencing at the time of writing. The EU is likely to take a position on a strong international governance framework, including alleviating hindrances for establishing marine protected areas in high seas areas. The new Communication reflects this position when it states that a future framework for the Arctic Ocean and its high seas should "include a new Regional Fisheries Management Organisation [RFMO] or Arrangement, combined with a new Regional Sea Convention, to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of resources in the Arctic high seas". This statement should be read in light of recent Arctic developments. First, there is an on-going work in the Arctic Council as regards Arctic marine governance, with a regional seas agreement initially considered as one possible option (currently, however, it appears to be off the table). Second, as regards fisheries, in 2015 the five Arctic Ocean coastal states (A5) signed a

[Declaration](#) on Arctic high seas fisheries, unilaterally banning high seas fishing by own vessels until sufficient data on climate change impacts is available. At the same time, the A5 saw no need for an Arctic Ocean RFMO in the near-term. Other fisheries actors, including the EU, were later invited to join this dialogue, which materialized at a meeting in Washington, D.C. in December 2015. The Communication welcomes the A5 Declaration, but the Commission and the HR stress that these developments concern an area beyond national jurisdiction. Hence, a potential RFMO needs to involve all major fishing nations in order to establish appropriate international measures.

The Role of Science

With climate change being the reason why the EU should be engaged in Arctic matters, research, science and innovation are considered the key component of how the EU aims to create regional credibility. In line with its previous approaches, research has been attributed the key role for effective cooperation between Arctic 'insiders' and Arctic 'outsiders'. In the words of the Commission and the HR, "science can be used as a catalyst to support a common understanding, enabling jointly agreed solutions to be reached and foster[ing] peace [and] cooperation". Throughout the Joint Communication, the Commission and the HR position the EU as a key partner for Arctic cooperation with research and science framed as the Union's main regional contribution – facts that have been emphasised in the 2012 Communication and its two add-ons. Moreover, scientific cooperation also has the potential to strengthen the Union's collaborative efforts towards its Arctic partners.



Signing of the Galway Statement on 24.03.2013. Source: European Commission 2013.

The EU and the Big Arctic Three

The EU's Arctic collaboration with Canada and the U.S. currently seems to be at its 'Arctic' high point. After losing the case at the WTO regarding the EU's ban on the trade in commercial seal products (Regulation (EC) No 1007/2009), Canada has stopped blocking the accreditation of the Union's observer status in the Arctic Council. Furthermore, the three partners established enhanced maritime (Atlantic and Arctic) science cooperation in the framework of the [Galway Statement](#) - a clear example of the importance of science diplomacy and scientific presence in the Arctic for actors external to the region (which includes the EU as regards the Arctic Ocean).

The relations with Russia – tainted by the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and mutual sanction regimes - are less a reason for celebration. Eventually, it was Russian resistance that prevented the EU from concluding the Arctic Council (non)-observer-ship saga during the Iqaluit Ministerial Meeting in 2015. Yet, the new

Joint Communication opens up the possibility for cooperation with Russia. According to the Union's HR Federica Mogherini, the policy update is part of the principle of selective engagement between the EU and Russia as recently agreed on by the foreign ministers of the EU-28 and the HR (Eriksson 2016).

Summary

In sum, the Joint Communication's 'performance' concerning the area of 'international cooperation' will not surprise an EU-Arctic-policy-informed reader. Based on its early Arctic experiences and the turmoil following suggestion of an Arctic Treaty based on the Antarctic template ([EP 2008 Resolution](#)) and the emphasis on "enhanced governance" ([Commission 2008 Communication](#)), the Union's Arctic steps ever since then have been shaped by terminological diligence and an overall cautious approach that rather defines the Union as Arctic suppliant than equal Arctic actor. An analysis of the 2012 Joint Communication finds the "EU's unwillingness to step on the toes of any of the Arctic states by remaining largely unspecific, pushing back

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Infographic: European Commission, 2016, Twitter #EUArctic.

against the perception of the EU as a “super-regulator” and concentrating on environmental, climate change and research issues, supporting any effort to ensure the effective stewardship of the Arctic environment” (Keil & Raspotnik 2012). This conclusion also holds true for the 2016 Joint Communication. Eventually, science seems to be the internally agreed upon key should finally open the Arctic governance and cooperation door. The door to a neighbourhood that is generally perceived as peaceful and stable, embedded in a distinct cooperative environment. Accordingly, also the currently developed Global Strategy will essentially stress the cooperative path the EU wants to take in the

Arctic region, with the Union contributing to soft security issues such as research, science and infrastructure (Raspotnik 2016).

CONCLUSION

The new Joint Communication on the EU's Arctic policy generally follows the lines drawn in previous EU Arctic policy statements: climate and environment, sustainability and regional cooperation. Additionally, the policy update also includes signs of evolution regarding the EU's understanding of regional developments and of the Union's place in the changing Arctic economic, environmental and political landscape.

The Communication does not deliver on the promise included in its title, namely that it proposes to establish a truly "integrated EU Arctic policy". Integration - in the most common understanding of the word - would entail formulating a set of common objectives for various EU actions, jointly managing them (perhaps even as a single policy), and providing various Arctic-relevant sectoral policies with a common set of principles. The EU Arctic policy encompasses too many diverse issues – both internal and external – and it is too marginal for the EU in order to realistically aim for the envisaged integration. The unhelpful word "integrated" obscures both tangible outputs proposed in the new policy statement as well as various problematic issues. As a general policy statement, the Communication is vague on many issues and lacks concrete ideas how various goals are to be exactly achieved. The Communication remains primarily a list of on-going actions and existing commitments. Moreover, the Communication still confusingly mixes issues specific to Arctic Ocean and to the European northernmost regions, which is likely to lead to a degree of confusion among its different audiences.

The EU Arctic policy is clearly evolving towards a greater focus on the challenges specific for the European Arctic. Here, the main emphasis is on economic development, traditionally packed in

the language of sustainability. The vision of the Arctic's future moved now away from the overblown expectations of rapidly expanding maritime shipping and hydrocarbon extraction. As a result, the attention shifts to economic activities that show more promise and are less likely to cause harm to fragile Arctic environment. These are embedded in themes of innovation, entrepreneurship, circular economy, bioeconomy, and renewables. Europe's northernmost regions are expected to contribute to the development of cold climate technologies and – of course sustainable – Arctic-ready solutions. North-South transport connections and digital accessibility are to support these developments, although a lack of any clear commitments remains. Furthermore, the new Communication also includes suggestions on the general shift in the EU support from regional development funding to investment financing and loans. The latter may be problematic for many European Arctic stakeholders.

Concrete ideas for better coordination of EU Arctic-relevant funding have been proposed, namely the forum for European Arctic authorities at various levels and network of managers of EU funding programmes. Silence on participation of indigenous peoples in these frameworks is, however, disturbing. If successful, these fora may produce overarching objectives for EU support in the North. Furthermore, the Commission and the High Representative suggest the Council and the Parliament to strengthen their respective internal coordination of Arctic affairs.

As regards international cooperation, the Union's Arctic steps - ever since the early unfortunate statements on, *inter alia*, an Arctic treaty - are shaped by terminological diligence and an overall cautious approach that rather defines the Union as Arctic suppliant than equal Arctic actor. Thus, the EU is careful not to be perceived as a super-regulator or normative preacher, focusing on climate change, environmental issues and its own positive

contribution to Arctic cooperation. Science seems to be the internally agreed-on key that aims to finally open the Arctic governance/cooperation door.

The EU is now drawing its new Global Strategy and the North/Arctic is generally considered one of few positive directions in the EU's ever more precarious international environment. The Union's main contribution to this environment will be via soft security measures, such as delivering on science and infrastructure. The very basis on how and where to further cooperate in the Arctic was now illustrated in the new Joint Communication.

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ArCticles is a series of entries by Arctic Centre staff relating to current Arctic issues, published by the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland. The responsibility for the views expressed rests with the authors.

ArCticles, 1/2016

Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, May 2016

www.arcticcentre.org/arcticles

ISSN: 2343-4260