

Editors' Note

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Any discussions on the Arctic must be linked with the impending consequences of climate change. We have learned that the effects of climate change in the Arctic are drastic. We are aware that the presence of ice is important for the Arctic in order to maintain its natural ecological processes, which provide life support systems for humans, animals and plants. Climate change results in relatively faster rises in temperatures across the Arctic. Arctic climatological science provides us with evidence on the adverse consequences of changing conditions, such as those observed with melting ice sheets. Scientists often visualize the Arctic changes in order to illustrate results of their expeditions and investigations. The outcomes are indeed quite ominous.

If you put "Arctic" in a google image search, it is given that you find a great deal of images showing the detrimental effects of climate change. Amongst the iconic pictures, for example, are those of the polar bear – an ice-dependent species – depicted to be fighting intensely to survive on tiny ice masses surrounded by open waters. These images provide the tangible examples of imminent loss of biodiversity as a result of the changing climate. To what degree will the loss of biodiversity affect the Arctic and its

natural environment, and subsequently the overall social-ecological processes? How much knowledge so far do we have on the Arctic? At the moment we still lack an adequate amount. This lack of sufficient knowledge is likely the reason why recently signed Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement offered a moratorium on Arctic fishing for next sixteen years until further scientific information is available.

Despite the lack of sufficient knowledge on the extent of climate-related ecological consequences, certain industries in the region are expanding, notably in oil, gas, and mineral extraction further supplemented by maritime navigation – including through the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Northwestern Passage (NP). This is particularly relevant for the European parts of the Arctic, of which the largest share is held by Russia. In recent years, Russia has been investing heavily in both oil and gas developments as well as in infrastructural developments to support anticipated opportunities with Arctic maritime navigation. The Yamal peninsula and Norilsk specifically are becoming promising hubs to attract substantial investments. The Yamal region in particular has been rich in oil and gas reserves, especially with liquefied natural gas (LNG). Norilsk likewise has abundant stores of nickel, copper, and palladium deposits. Transportation of these resources is increasingly being carried out through the NSR and so far

sixteen ports provide facilities, with two of them – the ports of Murmansk and Sabetta – being open year-round with full facilities.

Both national and foreign direct investments are active in the expansion to promote sophisticated infrastructure for Arctic development. Actors from both within and outside the Arctic are increasingly engaged in such developmental prospects. Nations with heavy energy demands, (e.g. East Asian countries) are seemingly on the forefront to promote business cooperation. China, for example, in early 2018 endorsed its official Arctic policy, highlighting joint cooperation for building “Polar Silk Road” as an extension of its massive Belt and Road Initiative. As one of the major shipping nations of the world, China continues to use the NSR. Last September, its icebreaker vessel – the Snow Dragon – accomplished the three month long 9th Arctic Expedition, which connected both the NSR and NP. The latest Chinese icebreaker vessel – the Snow Dragon II – has also been inaugurated this year. Chinese companies, the Silk Road Fund and Asian Infrastructure Invest Bank, have jointly invested in infrastructure development along the NSR in the Arctic. It is not only China, but also for example, South Korea – a major shipbuilding country – which is investing in building icebreaker vessels to transport LNG, in particular from the Yamal LNG projects. The world’s first ice-breaking LNG carrier was delivered

by South Korea in late 2016. The country has received a contract to build yet another 15 icebreaker LNG carriers, of which nine are due to be delivered by the end of 2018 and the rest in 2019. These carriers will transport LNG from Sabetta port to Asian markets. It is therefore apparent that there will be great pressure on Arctic environment with even further developmental potential, which could in turn accelerate the effects of climate change.

As such activities unfold in the Arctic, the effects of Arctic development are not adequately known as there is a gap in science-based findings on the impending consequences. Today one of the primary points in the agenda of Arctic development is to explore the ways in which engaged actors must responsibly behave. In its agenda, the Finnish chairmanship of the Arctic Council (AC), put sustainable development of the Arctic as one of its top priorities. Recently the AC has held its first ever presentation at UN headquarters at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development where, in addition to consequences stemming from the changes facing the Arctic, the value of collaboration for sustainable development was highlighted. Engaging all relevant stakeholders from both within and beyond the Arctic and integrating the Arctic in global-level actions will create room for the promotion of sustainable development in the Arctic. The reference to global action is sought, for example, in

a recent intergovernmental conference on an international legally-binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond any national jurisdiction (BBNJ). Although, the aim of the instrument provides general focus on BBNJ, and not the Arctic specific concerns, in a side event during the meeting, it was discussed whether, and how, the AC could play a role in protecting biodiversity in Arctic areas beyond national jurisdiction within the framework of some potential collaborative instrument.

The presentation above is just the reflection of some of the developments.

There are lot more ongoing in terms of Arctic policy and law. This sixth volume of the Current Developments in Arctic Law presents some of the interesting developments. The volume includes 11 interesting short articles with updated knowledge on their contents. While these contributions are not peer-reviewed, and opinions expressed therein are of those of the individual authors of each chapter, we hope that the readers will find these articles and the volume in its entirety interesting and insightful.

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