

Article 1: Malgorzata Smieszek & Paula Kankaanpää (2015). Role of the Arctic Council Chairmanship. In: Heininen, L., H. Exner-Pirot, & J. Plouffe (eds.), *Arctic Yearbook 2015*. Akureyri, Iceland: Northern Research Forum, pp. 247-262.

Role of the Arctic Council Chairmanship

Malgorzata Smieszek and Paula Kankaanpää

In spite of its arguable relevance the question of the role of the chair in the Arctic Council (AC) has until now received relatively little academic attention. When in 2013 Canada assumed the AC chairmanship, which rotates on the biennial basis among the Council's Members, the Arctic Council entered the second round of chairmanships, with the first one being over after sixteen years since the formation of the AC in 1996. In the meantime, in result of processes of climate change and globalization the Arctic region has gone through profound transformation and the United States, the AC Chair from 2015 to 2017, has evolved from one of the greatest opponents of the Council to its outspoken proponent. Yet most of the rules pertaining to chairmanship have remained intact since AC rules of procedure were adopted during the first AC Ministerial meeting in Iqaluit in 1998. What tasks do they assign to the Arctic Council chair? What is the actual role of AC the chairmanship? To address these questions, this article first looks into theoretical insights on the influence wielded by formal leaders in international cooperation and multilateral bargaining. It then turns its attention to origins of the institutional setup of circumpolar cooperation and continues with application of theory to rules and practice of the Arctic Council, complemented by inclusion of effects of the external developments on the course of the AC. In conclusion, it offers an initial assessment of the role exerted by the country chairing the Arctic Council.

Introduction

Many of the recent debates on the Arctic have revolved around the role of the Arctic Council (AC) in emerging regional governance structures. This high-level forum for circumpolar cooperation has been recognized as the primary body in the region not only by the eight Arctic states, but also by numerous non-Arctic actors as reflected in the number of applications for Observer status received before the AC Ministerial meetings in Kiruna in May 2013 and in Iqaluit in April 2015. The Ministerial meeting in Kiruna drew a great deal of attention, in particular, because of much-awaited decisions on the applications of five major Asian economies and the European Union (EU) for Observer status. With China, India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Italy welcomed, and the EU's application deferred, discussions about the role of AC Observers continued, along with other major developments of importance such as the finalization of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Polar Code, the

Malgorzata Smieszek is a Researcher at the Arctic Centre, University of Lapland. Professor Paula Kankaanpää is the Director of Marine Research Centre, Finnish Environment Institute (SYKE) and was the Director of the Arctic Centre, University of Lapland from 2000 to 2015.

establishment of the Arctic Economic Council, and the potentially grave consequences of Russia's March 2014 annexation of Crimea for circumpolar cooperation. These developments came at the time when Canada, sixteen years after the inception of the Council, held the AC chair for the second time, from May 2013 to April 2015. Whereas a number of articles have addressed the second Canadian chairmanship (Exner-Pirot 2011; Fenge 2013; Spence 2013) and others have anticipated the second US chairmanship from 2015 to 2017, the question of the role of the chair in the Arctic Council - and its influence on Arctic politics- has until now received relatively little academic attention.¹ To address it, this article first looks into theoretical insights on the influence wielded by formal leaders in international cooperation and multilateral bargaining. It then turns its attention to the debates over the institutional setup of circumpolar cooperation, which evolved during the negotiations leading to the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996. It continues with application of theory to rules and practice of the Arctic Council, complemented by inclusion of effects of the external developments on the course of the AC. The paper concludes with an initial assessment of the role exerted by a state chairing the Arctic Council.

Theoretical approaches to the chair

The scant attention offered to the question of chairmanship is by no means limited to the context of the Arctic Council. As Jonas Tallberg points out, the power of the chair is a topic that “so far has received limited systematic attention by international relations (IR) theorists” (Tallberg 2010: 241), despite important implications that the concept of formal leadership holds for our comprehension of multilateral bargaining. Typically, negotiations have been “conceptualized as a process between actors that enjoy the same formal status, but differ in terms of power capabilities, preferences, information, ideas, and alternatives to negotiated agreements” (Tallberg 2010: 242). Indeed, the influence wielded by a formal leader may be severely constrained by both formal (i.e. decision-making rules) and informal (expected norms of behavior) limitations, however this does not mean that the chair should be considered as a function with no impact over the outcomes of the process.

Studies of power and effectiveness of the chair (Blavoukos, Tsakonas & Bourantonis 2006; Tallberg 2004, 2010) are to large extent informed by the rational approach to the design of international institutions, which presumes, in broad terms, “that states use international institutions to further their own goals, and they design institutions accordingly” (Koremenos, Lipson & Snidal 2001: 762). In line with this approach, the design features of specific institutions are a “result of rational, purposive interactions among states and other international actors to solve specific problems” (Koremenos et al. 2001: 762). To this end the position of chair is a functional response to problems relating to collective action and bargaining in a multilateral context: potential failures of agenda, negotiation and representation. Through tasks typically conferred upon the chairmanship - namely agenda management, brokerage and representation - states seek to address difficulties of overcrowded or shifting agendas, the inability of parties to identify underlying areas of agreement, as well as handling relations with non-members and representing the institution vis-à-vis third parties.

Agenda management involves activities related to agenda-setting (introduction of new issues on the policy agenda), structuring (emphasizing or de-emphasizing issues already on the agenda) and agenda

exclusion (active barring of issues from the policy agenda).² Moreover, as leaders of individual sessions, chairs open and close meetings, structure their agenda, allot the right to speak to participants and summarize the results of sessions (Tallberg 2010: 246). Brokerage, rather than involving a formal concession of powers to the chair by the other parties, refers to the situation where a chair serves as a channel of information among states who, for tactical reasons, conceal their true preferences but share information about them with the chair who thus gets privileged access to information that may then be used to construct compromise. In addition, oftentimes the chair's mandate gives it a right to produce a single negotiating text as a basis for consensus. Finally, representation involves the chair being empowered by the other parties to speak on their behalf, since institutions typically cannot be represented by all their constituent members in relations with the outside world (Tallberg 2010: 245).

According to Tallberg, "the office of the chair, once vested with power of process control, offers a political platform for influencing outcomes of the process" (Tallberg 2010: 245). Even though the chair is usually expected to conduct assigned functions with a view to promoting collective gains, holding a chairmanship may be seen by certain actors as a 'window of opportunity' to shift the agenda and distribution of gains in pursuit of their national interests. Additionally, a comparison study carried out by Tallberg on three alternative ways of organizing the office of the chair - rotation between states (like the Presidency of the European Union), appointment of a supranational official (as in the case of the WTO Trade Negotiations Committee) and election of one state's representative (UN environmental conferences) - points to the rotating chairmanship (like the Arctic Council one) as a model particularly open to distributional influence and generating a process of logrolling, strengthened further in situations where the state in office controls multiple chairs of sub-groups within the organization and where the chairmanship of all or most of those sub-groups shift from one state to the other at the same time (Tallberg 2010).

Yet chairs do not operate in a world without constraints and the mere fact that a chairmanship rotates between state representatives is not a guarantee for patterns of distributional impact. Blavoukos, Bourantonis and Tsakonas differentiate between three groups of parameters that affect the chair's ability to perform the assigned roles and tasks.³ First, they point to the international environment and the nature of the issue under consideration. Since international institutions do not operate in a vacuum, "the systemic power configuration creates an international climate within which the chair operates" (Blavoukos et al. 2006: 150). A polarized, conflictive climate constrains not only the chair's resources (e.g. privileged access to information) but also limits its assigned roles to merely procedural tasks and formalities. As for the nature of issue under consideration, its salience and the degree of controversy associated with it both affect the chair's ability to perform its functions. In general, the more salient the issue is for the parties, the more difficult it is for the chair to succeed. The same is true with the degree of controversy. For example, matters of 'hard' military security and sovereignty are usually more sensitive and therefore more difficult to handle than 'soft' matters such as economic cooperation or environmental protection, with the Arctic Council being an excellent example of this.

The second group of parameters affecting the chair is institution-specific and involves the institutional design of the chairmanship, the resources available to a chair, and the formal and informal constraints put upon it. The institutional design of the chairmanship – the three alternative ways of organizing the

office of the chair are outlined above - is the critical factor, since it affects both the quality and quantity of the chair's resources as well as the formal and informal constraints. More specifically, what matters is the intervention capacity given to the chair (i.e. control over agenda management and brokerage) as well as institutional continuity and the duration of the chairmanship. In short, the greater the chair's control over process, the more institutional continuity and the longer the duration of its tenure, the more effective the chair will be (Blavoukos et al. 2006: 152). When it comes to the resources available to the chair, these include the already mentioned asymmetrical access to information and legitimacy of the chairmanship office. With regard to formal constraints placed upon the chair, these include the mandate, decision-making rules and control mechanisms within the institution. The mandate – or, like in the case of the United Nations Security Council and the Arctic Council, rules of procedure – outline tasks and functions assigned to the chair, thus defining its intervention capacity. Again, the less detailed the mandate, the more the institutional autonomy of the chair. Similarly with decision-making rules, the more demanding the rule (for example special majority, unanimity or consensus), the less maneuvering space for the chair and the more curtailed its role. As for control mechanisms, these usually take the shape of appointment as well as administrative and oversight procedures, while informal constraints include behavioral norms that are often implicit but which the chair is nevertheless expected to follow. Most often, these are the norms of efficiency, neutrality and impartiality, as well as the presumption of the chair as an 'honest broker' in the process (Blavoukos et al. 2006: 154-155).

Finally, the last group of parameters conditioning the effectiveness of the formal leader concern personnel-specific features which can help (or impede) procedural and bargaining efficiency, as well as country-specific attributes that may affect political status and ease the performance of the chair's functions (Blavoukos et al. 2006: 156). As much as the focus of this article is on states performing the role of the chair in the Arctic Council and the detailed examination of all individuals holding the position of the chair of the Senior Arctic Officials⁴ throughout the AC history goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to recognize the leadership function that the chair as individual can execute. Even though Oran Young proposed a distinction among three forms of leadership (structural, entrepreneurial and intellectual) in reference to regime formation, arguably it can be equally applied to the functioning of the institution once it is in place. In particular it is worth noting here the entrepreneurial leadership, where the leader is an individual who "leads by making the use of negotiating skill to influence the manner in which issues are presented in the context of institutional bargaining" (Young 1991: 288) and who helps to "broker deals acceptable to parties engaged in competitive-cooperative interactions" (Young 1999: 806). Importantly, the entrepreneurial leader is not a third party in a bargaining process and "[u]nlike mediators, [those leaders] (...) are typically agents of actors that possess stakes in the issues at hand and participate in the negotiations in their own right" (Young 1991: 295) - similarly to the individual holding position of the SAO chair during the given AC chairmanship period.

To conclude this theory section, although the role of chair has been oftentimes overlooked in the IR literature, and especially in the literature on the Arctic Council, the evidence points to the chairmanship as a particularly powerful platform for leadership in international negotiations and multilateral bargaining (Tallberg 2010: 261). Despite the procedural character of most of the chair competences, the political importance of the chair should not be underestimated as the conduct of the chairmanship,

particularly in a rotating system, gives states some maneuvering space that they can use to their own advantage and in pursuit of their national interests. For this reason, we can expect the institutional mechanism of the chairmanship of the Arctic Council to have some influence on the direction of Arctic international relations.

From the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy to the Arctic Council

Before going into specifics of the AC chair and provisions regulating its role in the Council, the theoretical insights above can help us understand the struggles carried over the shape of the Arctic Council. According to rational choice institutionalism, states construct institutions to advance their goals and support their interests. They spend time and effort negotiating institutions and fighting over their design not only because the institutional setup affects the outcomes, but also because the institutions, once in place, cannot be changed or adapted quickly to world's changing conditions and configurations of international power (Koremenos et al. 2001:762) - the UN Security Council being the primary example here. At the same time, wrangles over the design and the procedural issues represent in fact debates on more fundamental questions of purpose and direction - as it was in the case of the Arctic Council (Scrivener 1999: 57). Whereas the paragraph below does not focus exclusively on the AC chair, it offers instead a bigger picture of negotiations towards establishment of the Council and how position take by the United States at that time affected today's shape of this institution.

The origins of the Arctic Council date back to the early post-Cold War period when in June 1991 representatives of eight Arctic states (today's members of the Arctic Council) adopted the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) to protect the environment of high north latitudes (see: Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy 1991; Koivurova & VanderZwaag 2007; Nilson 1997; Young 1998). In view of some states, however, the narrowly defined focus of the AEPS did not allow to address all relevant matters pertaining to the Arctic. In particular, Canada was in favour of establishing an umbrella-type of political body to handle a wider set of issues in framework of sustainable development in the region (Canadian Arctic Resources Committee 1991; English 2013). The Canadian initiative for the establishment of the Arctic Council met yet a great deal of resistance and, until the last moment, it was uncertain whether it would come to a successful conclusion. The greatest opposition came from the United States which opposed broadening the environmental cooperation of the AEPS into a broader framework for several reasons, including the participation of indigenous peoples, the use of the concept of sustainable development, issues of military security and, finally, a low degree of interest in the Arctic among Washington officials and politicians (English 2013: 188-193).⁵ The US was not in favour of creation of new international organizations and it consistently held a minimalist view of the Arctic Council as a purely consultative forum with limited functions.⁶ Even the signature of the Ottawa Declaration in September 1996 did not end the discussions over the shape of what came to be "a high-level forum" for Arctic cooperation and coordination, and regardless of the fact that as the "outgrowth" (Bloom 1999: 712) of the AEPS the AC inherited most of its structures, the drafting of rules of procedure for the Council continued well into the first years of the Arctic Council when Canada held its chair. From the outset of the negotiations the US argued that the role of the AC chair should be confined largely to the actual ministerial meetings of the Council. This,

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it seems, was intended to deprive the chair of the right to speak or act on behalf of all Arctic states in relations with outside countries or international organizations. Similarly, the US insisted that the functions of the Council's Secretariat should be reduced to a minimum (Scrivener 1999: 55-56) and handled primarily by the chair (at that time 'the Host Country'), thus further reducing the Council's scope for independent action. Finally, after much protracted debate, the rules of procedure of the Arctic Council were adopted at its first ministerial meeting in Iqaluit in September 1998. In many respects, they remain intact today, despite certain revisions in 2013.

Main tasks of the chair of the Arctic Council

According to the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council, the Council should normally meet on a biennial basis (Article 4) and responsibility for hosting meetings of the AC, including provisions of secretariat functions, should rotate sequentially among the Arctic States (Article 5) (*Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council* 1996). The AC rules of procedure of 1998 did not speak of the chair of the Arctic Council but the Host Country, meaning "the Arctic State which chairs the Arctic Council during the particular period in question" (Arctic Council 1998). However, as the term Host Country was replaced by the one of Chairmanship in the revised Rules of Procedure adopted during the Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna, Sweden in May 2013 (Arctic Council 2013), the term chairmanship will be used subsequently in this text. In addition, the revised rules from 2013 are numbered, unlike the ones from 1998; therefore, the numbers in brackets below refer to revised provisions. Finally, in cases where the revised rules altered or added to the wording of original provisions, the relevant information is provided.

As stipulated in the rules, the Chairmanship is to act as the AC Chair from the conclusion of a biennial Ministerial meeting to the conclusion of the next biennial Ministerial meeting, and coordinate arrangements for Ministerial meetings. These functions were complemented in the revised rules from 2013 by the responsibility "for facilitating preparations for Ministerial and SAO meetings, in coordination with the Secretariat, and carrying out such other tasks as the Arctic Council may require or direct" (Rule 10). After consultation with Arctic states and Permanent Participants, the Chairmanship may place reasonable limits on the size of all delegations for a meeting and shall notify all delegations accordingly (Rule 13) and, subject to the approval of the Arctic states, designate the Chairperson for Ministerial meetings (Rule 16). As laid out above, in accordance with article 5 of Ottawa Declaration, the chair of the Arctic Council shall rotate among the Arctic states and prior to the conclusion of each Ministerial meeting, the Arctic states shall confirm the host of the next meeting (Rule 17). The Chairmanship shall propose a date and the location for a biennial Ministerial meeting at least six months in advance of the proposed date (Rule 18) and, after consultation with Arctic states and Permanent Participants, circulate a draft agenda which - after revision - is to be adopted by a decision of the Arctic states at the opening session of each Ministerial meeting (Rule 19). According to Rule 22 the Chairmanship shall provide the chairperson for the SAO meetings, subject to the concurrence of the Arctic states there represented, while meetings of SAOs should take place at least twice yearly at the call of the Chairmanship, after consultation with the representatives of the Permanent Participants (Rule 25). With regard to public communications, the Chairmanship is responsible for preparing a report of the meeting as well as releasing any minutes, communications

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and documents – subject, in all instances, to the approval of the relevant officials of each Arctic state (Rule 45). With respect to communications with the AC, the Chairmanship shall designate a point of contact for communications and inform all Arctic States, Permanent Participants and Observers accordingly (Rule 46).⁷ It shall as well make reasonable efforts to provide for Russian interpretation at Ministerial and SAO meetings (Rule 42).

When the Arctic Council reached its tenth anniversary, at the time when Norway assumed its chairmanship in 2006, the discussions began on the review process and evaluation of the Council's work, in order to improve its effectiveness and efficiency (Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). Yet, whereas many were of the opinion that the AC required strengthening and considered enhancing capabilities of the chair, it took another seven years before the new rules of procedures were eventually adopted. The major difference between rules from 1998 and 2013 refer to the Observers and the role of Secretariat, illustrating well not only the impact of external developments (i.e. much greater interest of non-Arctic actors in the Arctic), but also the evolution of the approach taken by the Arctic states towards the AC as an institution. The first AC rules of procedures did not contain detailed provisions on the status of Observers, which were developed only during the Danish chairmanship (2009-2011) in response to rapidly growing interest of outside actors in the Arctic affairs. They were adopted in the Ministerial meeting in Nuuk in 2011 and subsequently included in the Annex 2 to the revised rules of procedure from 2013. With respect to the AC chair, the new rules give the Chairmanship a role in managing the reception and circulation of applications for Observer status to all Arctic states and Permanent Participants (Art. 1-2 of Annex 2).⁸ In addition, Observers are expected to submit to the Chairmanship up to date information about their relevant activities and contributions to the work of the Council (Art.4 of Annex 2) before the Ministerial meetings where the review of Observers is to take place;⁹ and the Chairmanship shall distribute this information to all Members and PPs together with a list of accredited Observers (Art.5 of Annex 2).

Whilst original AC rules of procedure from 1998 assigned secretariat support functions to the Host Country which was “responsible for facilitating preparations for forthcoming Ministerial and SAO meetings, liaison and coordination, providing secretariat support functions and carrying out such other tasks as the Arctic Council may require or direct”(Arctic Council 1998), Rule 32 of the revised rules of procedure from 2013 makes the Secretariat responsible for the support functions set out in its separate Terms of Reference (Arctic Council 2013). The permanent Arctic Council Secretariat was established by a decision from the 2011 Nuuk Ministerial meeting. Located in Tromsø, Norway, it became operational on June 1, 2013. According to its terms of reference, the AC Secretariat is to, *inter alia*, assist the Chair in drafting meeting documents including final reports, developing strategic communication and outreach plans and other documents under the direct supervision of the Chair, as well as providing other services and functions as may be required and directed by the Arctic Council and its Chair (Art. 2.2) (Arctic Council 2012). Furthermore, many of the duties of the Secretariat's director are associated with the SAO Chair (as provided by the chairing country): the director reports to SAOs through the SAO Chair, receives tasks from him or her, is under his or her direction and shall consult him or her on all matters of importance (Art. 3.3). In addition, when directed by the SAO Chair, the director represents the AC Secretariat externally (Art. 3.4) and performs such other functions as may be required and directed by the SAOs and the SAO Chair (Art. 3.6g). Finally, when it comes to

the administrative budget of the Secretariat, the Chair carries the costs, others than listed in the Art.6.1, as per current practice and the rules of procedure, including renting rooms and providing interpretation at the meetings of SAOs, deputy ministers and ministers (Art. 6.1). In conclusion, the establishment of a standing Secretariat gave the AC an administrative capacity and institutional memory that it did not possess previously and which was difficult to maintain with rotating chairmanships. However, as a more detailed examination of the Secretariat's terms of reference shows, much discretion and margin of maneuver is still left to the Chairmanship, in particular through the control that the SAO Chair maintains over the director of the Secretariat who has the overall responsibility for the management, administration and the day-to-day functioning of the Secretariat (Art. 3.2. and 3.4).

AC chairmanships - between theory and practice

When Canada assumed the AC chairmanship in 2013, the cycle of rotating chairmanships among the eight Arctic states began anew. In the first cycle, states proposed themselves as the next country to hold the chair which consequently moved from Canada (1996-1998) to the United States (1998-2000), Finland (2000-2002), Iceland (2002-2004), Russia (2004-2006), Norway (2006-2009)¹⁰, Denmark (2009-2011) and finally to Sweden (2011-2013). For their two-year term of office Arctic states typically have proposed a program of objectives or actions that they would like prioritized during their tenure. Arguably it is through advancement of those priorities that the chairmanship may be seen as a 'window of opportunity' to shift the agenda of the AC closer to the national interest of the state in office, even if constrained by the consensual nature of AC decision-making process.

According to theoretical insights, states typically confer upon the chair the tasks of agenda setting, brokerage and representation in response to problems related to bargaining in a multilateral context - even if in the case of the Arctic Council much of the evidence shows the United States resisting allowing the Council any resemblance to an international organization, and thus confining the actual role of the chair. Under the significant constraints of a consensus-based decision-making body (in concordance with the Article 7 of the Ottawa Declaration), the customary practice of suggesting the priorities for two-year rotating terms has nevertheless allowed the chairing country to play something of a leadership role in defining the AC objectives throughout its tenure (Spence 2015). In light of the culture of dialogue and the practice of round-table discussions within the AC and its subsidiary bodies (e.g. working groups) (Fenge & Funston 2015), the brokerage function is conceivably of lesser importance, whereas representation of the Arctic Council in other international fora requires more careful examination on a case-by-case basis¹¹ - since the AC rules of procedure allow not only the chairmanship, but also an Arctic state or other subsidiary body to undertake communications on AC matters "as may be agreed to in advance by the Arctic States" (Rule 11 of Revised Rules of Procedure, Arctic Council 2013). Moreover, the AC cannot represent its member states in international negotiations.

The parameters conditioning the chair's performance include the international environment, the nature of the issue, the institution-specific features and finally the chair's personal skills. In the case of the Arctic Council, both the external circumstances of relative détente in the aftermath of Cold War and the upfront explicit exclusion of military security from deliberations of the Council not only created

favorable conditions for the development of circumpolar cooperation, but also enabled the chair to carry out functions that extended beyond strictly assigned procedural tasks and formalities. On the one hand, the applied model of a chairmanship rotating every two years (a relatively long duration for a rotating chair system) has brought about space for the chairing country to promote its own priorities, e.g. through presented programs, with the implicit acquiescence of the other members (yet formally under the rule of consensus) as all the Arctic states eventually receive the same privileged opportunity of heading the AC. On the other hand, however, a two-year period may oftentimes be not enough to address effectively some of the major challenges identified in the Arctic. For that reason three Scandinavian countries: Norway, Denmark and Sweden decided to pursue next to their national objectives also a set of common priorities, to endorse continuity in the work of the Arctic Council during their consecutive chairmanships (*Norwegian, Danish, Swedish common objectives for their Arctic Council chairmanships 2006–2012*).¹² Yet, it did not prevent them from presenting as well their individual undertakings, reflective of their distinctive interests and concerns (Nord 2013) as much as of the changing external environment which for example pushed the Danish chairmanship to take upon the question of Observers to the Council (The Kingdom of Denmark 2009; see also: Graczyk 2011). It was for the first time during the Danish chairmanship period that the SAO chair, Mr. Lars Møller, attended the Observers' meeting in 2010 in Warsaw, followed by the Swedish SAO chair, Mr. Gustaf Lind, in March 2013 and the Canadian SAO, Ms. Susan Harper, who replaced the SAO chair at the "Warsaw Format" meeting with the AC Observer states in March 2015. Whereas similar meeting with the US SAO chair may be anticipated later into the US chairmanship, the United States has been active on the Observers' issues from its early days in the chair office, initiating for example a series of joint phone calls with the Observers to enhance with them channels of communication and exchange of information.¹³

Somewhat loosely defined rules of procedure leave some degree of discretion to the chair (for example in its relations with the AC Secretariat), albeit again under the requirement of consensus of all the AC Members for all decisions taken by the Council and its subsidiary bodies. Another form of what could be considered a safeguard mechanism to curtail the chair's autonomy has been the division of chairs over various AC working groups and task forces, where most of the Council's work is being done, among all the Arctic states. In concordance with Tallberg's findings a system where a state in office controls multiple chairs of sub-groups within the organization and where the chairmanship of all or most of those sub-groups shift from one state to the other at the same time is particularly open to a process of logrolling. In the Arctic Council, however, different Arctic states chair different working groups (with exception of Sustainable Development Working Group headed usually by the AC chair) and task forces, while the working group's secretariats ensure the continuity of carried projects and further shield them from too erratic shifting of the Council's priorities.

Finally, it is worth noting the role of individuals and potential of the SAO chairs as of the entrepreneurial leaders in the chairmanship process. As it was underlined earlier, entrepreneurial leaders are typically agents acting in the name of states (like the SAO chairs) or organizations, "subject to removal if they neglect (...) [their] interests" (Young 1991: 296). However, as much as they represent states' interests, the success of bargaining and institution's regular functioning depends many times on the chair's personal skills to formulate issues in the fashion agreeable to all parties, to overcome

impediments and finding common grounds to proceed. Conceivably, for example, the success of Icelandic chairmanship (2002-2004) drew upon the commitment and dedication of Icelandic SAO chair, Mr. Gunnar Pálsson (Fenge 2013).

Impact of domestic politics and international developments

As states construct institutions to advance their goals and support their interests, those institutions become a part of a broader matrix of national and foreign policies of their members, oftentimes influenced as much by changes at the domestic level as in the external environment. Similarly, the approach taken towards the Arctic Council as well as countries' proposed objectives reflect larger national and foreign policy interests of eight Arctic states, where the AC can be considered an arena for their pursuit of interests of greater or smaller importance, depending on the country's profile and importance of the Arctic in its domestic politics.

The good case in point here is the United States, the 2015-2017 chair of the Arctic Council, and the impact its domestic politics as well as foreign policy stances have had on the evolution of its approach towards the AC. As it was outlined earlier, the Arctic Council was very much a Canadian initiative. However, since its inception met so much resistance from the United States and many issues remained unresolved at the time of signing of Ottawa Declaration, the first Canadian chairmanship was almost entirely dedicated to drafting of rules of procedure, adopting terms of reference for the new sustainable development program (the primary extension from the environmentally focused AEPS) and making the body operational. Thus, in words of Evan Bloom, "as chair, the United States [was] (...) in charge of facilitating the first active phase of the Council's existence" (Bloom 1999: 717). Whilst the Arctic was not high on the overcrowded agendas of politicians in Washington DC, the actions pursued within the Council corresponded well with the climate policies of the Clinton administration ahead of the Kyoto conference in 1997 and led to launch of one of the most important and successful Arctic Council projects, namely the *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment* (ACIA) (Koivurova 2009; for more details on the ACIA process see: Nilsson 2007).¹⁴ At the same time, the process of ACIA illustrates how changes in domestic politics in the US, even beyond the chairmanship period, can translate into differences in the approach taken towards Arctic-related projects. In 2003, under George W. Bush administration, the instructions received by the US representative in the ACIA policy drafting committee proposed delaying the drafting of policy recommendations, which seriously hampered the policy part of the process (Fenge 2013; Nilsson 2007). Nonetheless, after significant public pressure on the United States, the final policy document was eventually agreed and the ACIA scientific report published in 2005.¹⁵

The political importance of the ACIA-fed projections of an opening Arctic Ocean was much reinforced two years later, when planting of the Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole in 2007 caused the worldwide media frenzy and created a surge in international interest in the Arctic. This event illustrates well how external factors and developments may influence the course of action and the evolution of the AC substantive agenda, as it was the case with the Danish chairmanship, which addressed in its programme the question of greater involvement of Observers in the work of the Arctic Council. Moreover, whereas occurrence of the Arctic Five format that followed signing of the Ilulissat

Declaration in 2008 only by Arctic rim states raised a number of questions about the legitimacy of various forums relevant for debating Arctic issues, the Arctic Council eventually came out of those debates “revived and even strengthened” (Pedersen 2012: 205), when in the Ministerial meeting in Nuuk in 2011 ministers announced the first legally binding agreement (on search and rescue) negotiated under the auspices of the AC and decided to “respond to the challenges and opportunities facing the Arctic by establishing a standing Arctic Council secretariat” (Arctic Council 2011).¹⁶

However, external events may have also potentially strong adverse effects on circumpolar cooperation. At present, one much discussed issue is whether cooperation at the Arctic Council can continue after Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014, an act strongly condemned by the other Arctic states. Even though the situation is still unfolding, arguably the AC chair can play a role in those processes. We may be seeing this happening presently, with the United States in its position as AC chair, taking a much more conciliatory approach towards Russia on Arctic matters than it is able to take on non-Arctic matters. Such appeasing, rather than belligerent, rhetoric adopted by the US AC officials helps to insulate the Council from broader geopolitics as well as maintain the circumpolar platform as an open channel of communication and collaboration at times of tensions and much worsening relations in other parts of the world.

Conclusions

It seems fair to say that the office of the Arctic Council chair has grown in stature over time by default rather than design. In course of negotiations over establishment of the Arctic Council, wrangles over the design and the procedural issues, as noticed by David Scrivener, represented in fact debates on more fundamental questions of purpose and direction (Scrivener 1999: 57). Since the United States strongly opposed an idea of a new international organization with circumpolar focus, it consistently held the minimalist view of the role the Council, objected to the creation of a permanent secretariat and insisted on confining the actual role of the AC chair. Yet it appears that the AC rules of procedure approved first in 1998 and revised in 2013 left enough scope for action for the Arctic states, as they consecutively assumed the chair office, to use it to advance their national priorities and interests, even though they were constrained to some degree by the consensual nature of decision-making in the Council. In addition, the international environment and relative détente following the end of Cold War, along with the upfront exclusion of controversial, military security matters from the Council deliberations enabled the chairs to carry out functions extending beyond strictly assigned procedural tasks and formalities. Perhaps the most noticeable example of the AC chair’s discretion has been the customary practice of presenting country’s program of objectives for its AC tenure - providing directions for the Arctic Council in two-year time spans and playing much of the agenda-setting role typically conferred to chairs in international organizations. The Arctic states have acquiesced in this because the system of rotating chairmanships ensures to them a reciprocal advantage, in that all states eventually get the similar privileged opportunity to head the AC. At the same time, the division of chairs over the working groups and task forces, where most of the AC work is done, among all the eight Arctic states and not linking them to the AC chairs puts in place a system of checks and balances (further strengthened by the use of consensus), which shields the institution from erratic shifting of priorities linked to the domestic interests of the state currently holding the lead office.

International institutions, however, do not operate in vacuum. The Arctic Council is no exception to this rule, as it has tried to adapt to the unprecedented attention paid to the Arctic as a result of processes of climate change and globalization. At present, one of the main challenges concerns insulating the Council from the increased international polarization that followed Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Since the Arctic Council is a consensus-based body, the endorsement of its actions by all Arctic states is essential to its continued functioning. On the one hand, the conditions of animosity may significantly reduce the scope of action for the chair and limit its potential to deliver. Yet on the other hand, they may potentially increase the importance of the Arctic Council chair in brokerage, identifying underlying areas of agreement and finding common ways to further cooperation.

Notes

1. For a study dedicated solely to the Swedish AC chairmanship see Nord 2013.
2. More on the agenda-shaping power see: Tallberg 2003.
3. Slightly different qualifications for the power of the chair in international cooperation are presented by Tallberg according to whom influence of formal leaders is conditional upon a demand for leadership (so where states cannot come on their own to consensus over the agenda, negotiated text etc.), alternative solutions for leadership (like international secretariats or even influential individuals), decision-making rules governing the conduct of negotiations (the more demanding rule, the lesser space for manouver by the chair) and finally design of the chairmanship (three models described in the main text).
4. As the AC Rules of Procedures stipulate, Chairmanship means the Arctic state which chairs the Arctic Council from the conclusion of a biennial Ministerial meeting to the conclusion of the next biennial Ministerial meeting. However, the term chair in the AC context is often used in relation to the chair of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) who is also provided by the country chairing the Council.
5. At that time neither the AEPS nor the Arctic Council were seen in the U.S. as strong tools of foreign policy where, when it comes for example to relations with Russia, other bilateral platforms of cooperation already existed (Russell 1996).
6. One could plausibly argue that the approach taken by the United States towards circumpolar collaboration was to large extent dictated by the overall setting of the 1990s. At the time, the world was clearly unipolar with "[t]he center of world power [being] (...) the unchallenged superpower, the United States, attended by its Western allies" (Krauthammer 1990: 23).
7. In addition, two rules, which refer, but not exclusively, to the chairmanship and the chair are Rule 11 which stipulates that "the Chairmanship, an Arctic State, or other subsidiary bodies may undertake communications on Arctic Council matters with other international fora as may be agreed to in advance by the Arctic States" and Rule 12 according to which "[d]uring

- the discussion of any matter, a representative of an Arctic State or Permanent Participant may rise to a point of order and the point of order shall be decided immediately by the chairperson in accordance with these Rules.”
8. The provision regulating applications by a potential Permanent Participant remained unchanged and the Chairmanship shall circulate it to all Arctic States and Permanent Participants at least 90 days prior to the Ministerial meeting at which the matter is to be decided (Rule 35).
 9. In practice, though, the reports are submitted to the AC Secretariat in Tromsø, Norway.
 10. As agreed in Norwegian, Danish and Swedish common objectives for their Arctic Council chairmanships 2006-2012, “the Ministerial Meetings could be moved to the spring to take advantage of the more favorable weather conditions in the Arctic during the season” (Norwegian, Danish, Swedish Common Objectives 2007), which resulted in postponing of the Ministerial meeting ending the Norwegian chairmanship from fall 2008 to spring 2009.
 11. One example of such case happened back in 2002 when the SAO Chair was authorized by the Council to speak on its behalf at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa (Fenge & Funston 2015: 18).
 12. The common objectives of the three countries included climate change, integrated management of resources, the International Polar Year (IPY), indigenous peoples and local living conditions, and management issues (*Norwegian, Danish, Swedish common objectives for their Arctic Council chairmanships 2006–2012*).
 13. The point, however, which remains to be addressed relates to the already mentioned reports on relevant activities and contributions of the Observers to the AC work. So far those submissions (from 2013 and 2015) did not receive any feedback from the Council, leading thus some of the Observers to question the point of this requirement.
 14. The work plan for the assessment was developed from the initiative of Robert Corell during the US AC chairmanship and approved in the AC Ministerial meeting in Barrow, Alaska in 2000. The United States not only chaired, but also largely financed the project, leading to its completion in 2004 and publication in 2005.
 15. The increasing importance of climate change on the US national agenda is also presently reflected in the US priorities for its chairmanship period which, next to improving living conditions for Arctic communities and the Arctic Ocean stewardship, include addressing impacts of climate change.
 16. The temporary dismissal of the Arctic Five (A5) format could be partially linked to the effect of changes in the US domestic politics on position of the United States vis-à-vis the Arctic cooperation when the US withdrew its support to the A5 in 2011, after Barack Obama succeeded George W. Bush as president and Hillary Clinton was appointed as secretary of state. The debates about the Arctic Five, however, again renewed, when five Arctic littoral states signed the moratorium on unregulated fishing in the central Arctic Ocean in July 2015.

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