

Building confidence in the Arctic

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Keep the Arctic after ice outside the sphere of conflicts and confrontation

Today we are writing the history of the Arctic – the Arctic, which has been described as the “world’s fragile final frontier”. Where else are we contemplating, or so much troubled, of the situation in, say 2030, not to talk about 2100? And why?

To take the last question first; the change in the Arctic will have profound consequences first of all to us living in the Arctic countries. But not only that; the economy, the environment and the people around the globe are affected by the state change underway here in the High North. As a German Author Mathias Hannemann puts the question in his book “Der Neue Norden”: What does it mean when a periphery moves to the center, “when Greenland Inuits and a Mayor of a small town in Northern Norway (like Kirkenes) become overnight global players, dreaming of the future and assured of a breakthrough?”

As Dr. Lassi Heininen is stressing, there is no conflict or confrontation in the Arctic. I agree. But there is always a threat. And the significance of this is that the instability here is not limited to the Arctic, but has wider, even global dimensions. Some researchers maintain that NATO and Russia are holding each other back in

the Arctic. There are also noises to keep “outsiders” (e.g. China, Japan, South Korea) out. We believe, however, that confidence is built by openness and engagement, not by erecting a “Fortress Arctic”.

Actors in the Arctic

Actors need to be identified and recognized, based on their legitimate role and interests

Indigenous people are self-evidently Arctic actors. They have made references to sovereignty/homeland/nation, but have “not yet spelled out explicitly their agenda” (Dr. Heininen). And it should be kept in mind that out of four million people living in the Arctic, only about ten percent are indigenous people. The rest are local inhabitants. Their role and rights cannot be ignored either.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stressed in Quebec at the meeting of the Arctic coastal states in spring 2010: “Arctic issues should include those with legitimate interests in the region. Arctic should stay as a showcase for cooperation, not create new divisions”. The key issue lies between Arctic and non-Arctic States. The engagement of non-Arctic states has to be always justified, taking into account a combination of factors (economic, environmental and

human dimensions – but also legal and security considerations).

Waiting for a breakthrough

In the Statoil “Petrodevelopment 2030” Report three scenarios are distinguished:

- “The Marginalized Region”. Here the Barents region will have an oil and gas breakthrough, but the profits will not stay in the region: “speaking of a dynamic region (is) only political rhetoric”
- “The Shifting Balance”. In this case only Russia will benefit, while in Norway people from the north are moving out, leaving a “huge natural museum”. The Sami will demand, and receive transfers from Oslo.
- “The Frontier”. Here the “High North is the Land of the Future” – a welfare region with optimism and economic growth; with increasing cross-border contacts; with successful and responsible interaction with resources.

Furthermore, “without skillful local politicians, and without education and economic policy to achieve the structural changes and keep the youth in the North, the breakthrough remains in the hands of others, who make the rules” (Hannemann).

Rely on facts

Facts speak for themselves. Facts guide our understanding, give us platform for decisions and reassure us that we are on the right track. Much of our assessment of the Arctic in 20 years from now – and even earlier – is based on guessing. And taking into account the accelerating, complex development, our predictions probably never can be 100% accurate. But the capacity for estimates and assessments in institutions both in Arctic and non-Arctic countries is constantly enhancing.

The Arctic Council is already known for some top-class surveys and reports. To set benchmarks and remain leader in the field further steps to strengthen the Council need to be considered, including the support to, and interaction with, expert and working groups of the Council, as well as contacts with leading Arctic experts around the world. Furthermore, a holistic, integrated approach on Arctic issues is required. In this regard, the comprehensive Arctic Change Assessment, including an Arctic resilience Report and consideration of an Eco-system based Management, was agreed upon in Nuuk Ministerial Session. This deserves our full support.

Facts are useless if we are not aware of them. Therefore, the Guidelines for the AC Communication and Outreach Strategy, adopted in Nuuk, represent an important tool to be fully used in the future.

Confidence building

Prof. Berkman points out, that “Cold War mindsets have been frozen in the Arctic Ocean; shared security strategies have not

been evolved between the US and Russia”. According to him, the challenge is to find balance between national and common interests, “while states always put their own interests first”. And while saying that there is no confrontation in the Arctic, we are reminded by a number of historians that military structures are, and have been in the Arctic from the beginning.

So what measures to build confidence could be recognized in the Arctic? Can the CSCE/OSCE Process give any guidance? And could the starting point be the explicit identification of peace as a common Arctic issue (which would mean virtually a fundamental re-visiting the 1996 Ottawa Declaration)?

Cooperation on different levels is the key: people-to-people; sub-regional; bilateral; regional; international. Political will is the prerequisite for cooperation.

The Way Ahead

In the Arctic, three global Megatrends prevail: climate change, exploitation of resources and globalization. To combine human, economic, environmental and security elements; how to get this orchestra to play in unison? And who should be the Conductor?

An example of this kind of joint consideration is the discussion lead by Prof. Berkman on Environmental Security in the Arctic, by which he means an integrated approach for assessing and responding to the risks generated by environmental state-change. Risk assessment in this context includes identifying necessary adaptation and mitigation responses, as well as reaching

a shared understanding of necessary infrastructure to see whether existing institutions are adequate. While broader discussions on Arctic governance appear at the moment premature – and would raise strong objection by some stakeholders – the Arctic is not just a regional matter, but has indisputably elements of Global Statesmanship.

The challenge is to conduct a dialogue, which is international, interdisciplinary and inclusive. To reach this, a High Level Forum by the Arctic Council is needed; as suggested by the Finnish Foreign Minister.

Finland has proposed the meeting at the top level to consider these broad cross-cutting Arctic issues. The idea of an Arctic Summit is not new, it has been raised by researchers over the years. (e.g. Prof. Robert Corell and Prof. Oran Young . And Prof. Paul Berkman has specified: ” Heads of State establish peace in the Arctic as an explicit common interest”). The First Arctic Summit, under the auspices of the Arctic Council, would give new direction to the Arctic cooperation and become a milestone in the development of the Council itself. For the Arctic Council the Summit would be a convincing manifestation of its status and significance; a tangible reassurance of the fact that the Council is moving from a decision-shaper to a decision-maker. The high profile attention given by the Heads of States of the Arctic countries could substantially contribute to the reaffirmation of the multilateral and rules-based approach we are witnessing in the Arctic today. It would have a major impact in reaching “High North with Low Tension”.