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The European Union and the Arctic: A Decade into Finding its Arcticness

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Abstract

Over the last decade, the European Union (EU) has established itself as an Arctic actor, with its various institutions attempting to formulate a coherent policy approach for its 'Northern Neighbourhood.' So far, the EU's decade-long involvement in the Arctic can be characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, the Union has an obvious presence in the north in terms of geography, legal competence, market access or its environmental footprint and contribution to Arctic science. On the other hand, the EU's Arctic engagement did not come without any difficulties due to a lack of coherence in its EU Arctic policy approach or the reluctance of Arctic states to accept the EU as a legitimate Arctic actor. This chapter will go to the bottom of the EU's decade-long search to find and understand its Arcticness.

1. Introduction

The Arctic is changing. Facing challenges driven by resource demands, changing power relations and climate change, the top of the world also demands the attention of an international actor that has not necessarily always been perceived as an Arctic one: the European Union (EU). Over the last ten years, the EU has felt an Arctic allure, with its various institutions attempting to formulate a coherent policy approach for its ‘Northern Neighbourhood.’

Yet, what role does the Arctic offer for the EU? How can a Union of 27 states – only three of them Arctic, but most of them non-Arctic – protect its regional interests in an increasingly globalized circumpolar North? Moreover, what are these interests? After the EU’s decade-long northern efforts with only minor progress, one pivotal question remains: what is the future of the EU’s Arctic role?

So far, the EU’s decade-long involvement in the Arctic can be characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, the Union has an obvious presence in the north in terms of geography, legal competence, market access or its environmental footprint and contribution to Arctic science. Its Member States Denmark (on behalf of Greenland, which itself is outside of the EU), Finland and Sweden are located in the region; and the EU has close relationships with the other five Arctic states. On the other hand, three factors have made the EU’s efforts to become constructively involved in the Arctic both controversial and complex. These factors are its lack of direct access to the Arctic Ocean, which seems to be key of conventional ‘Arcticness’ (Dodds, 2012), its slightly paternalistic Arctic policy statements portraying the EU as part of the ‘solution’ to the region’s real or perceived challenges without sufficiently taking into considerations Arctic sensitivities, and the sustained difficulty to find a convincing Arctic narrative that would attract broader attention throughout the Member States (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019b).¹

¹ Based on Moisiso et al., we use the spelling ‘EUropean’ to highlight the idea that Europe cannot be reduced to the EU only (2013, p. 754). This means that every time we use the adjective ‘EUropean’ we either refer to something of, from, or related to the European Union (= EU). Any reference without a capital U either directly relates to the entire continent ‘Europe’ or to specific names, e.g. European Commission.

This chapter will go to the bottom of the EU's decade-long search to find and understand its Arcticness.² We will first outline the EU's gateways to the Arctic by identifying its legal, environmental, research and economic links to the region. This is followed by a discussion on the EU's Arctic efforts to communicate its Arctic interests via the development of a distinct EU policy for the Arctic. We will conclude with an analysis of the various problems of the EU's Arcticness.

2. The European Union's Gateways to the Arctic

The EU is no stranger to its 'northern neighbourhood' and holds multiple links to the Arctic, on both geographical, legal, economic, environmental, research and regional development-related levels. However, in geographical and legal terms, the EU's externality as regards the majority of Arctic states represents a major constraint on the EU's 'Arcticness'. The EU has no coastline to the Arctic Ocean, and EU law applies in the Arctic directly only to Finland and Sweden, and via the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, to Iceland and Norway (excluding the Archipelago of Svalbard). Hence, foreign policy plays an essential role in respect to EU Arctic activities. This includes, for instance, the EU's cooperative efforts with Russia in the European Arctic, and its engagement within the Arctic Council (AC).³

Clearly, the EU is an Arctic actor. Not only are three of its Member States considered Arctic, but the EU also holds a strong, multidimensional regional presence. This includes, among many others, being one of the regulators of human activities in the European Arctic, the EU's contribution to Arctic research as well as its participation in regional regimes such as the AC. The EU's economy and population also affects the region via an environmental and climate footprint, as well as its market influence, essentially contributing to the demand for Arctic resources. Moreover, EU policies – such as climate change mitigation efforts, clean air policy or raw materials strategies – have an impact on these environmental and economic footprints.

² For the purposes of this chapter, we define 'Arcticness' as the EU's decade-long endeavour to internally determine its Arctic identity, as well as externally justifying its regional presence as a stakeholder mostly located outside the Arctic.

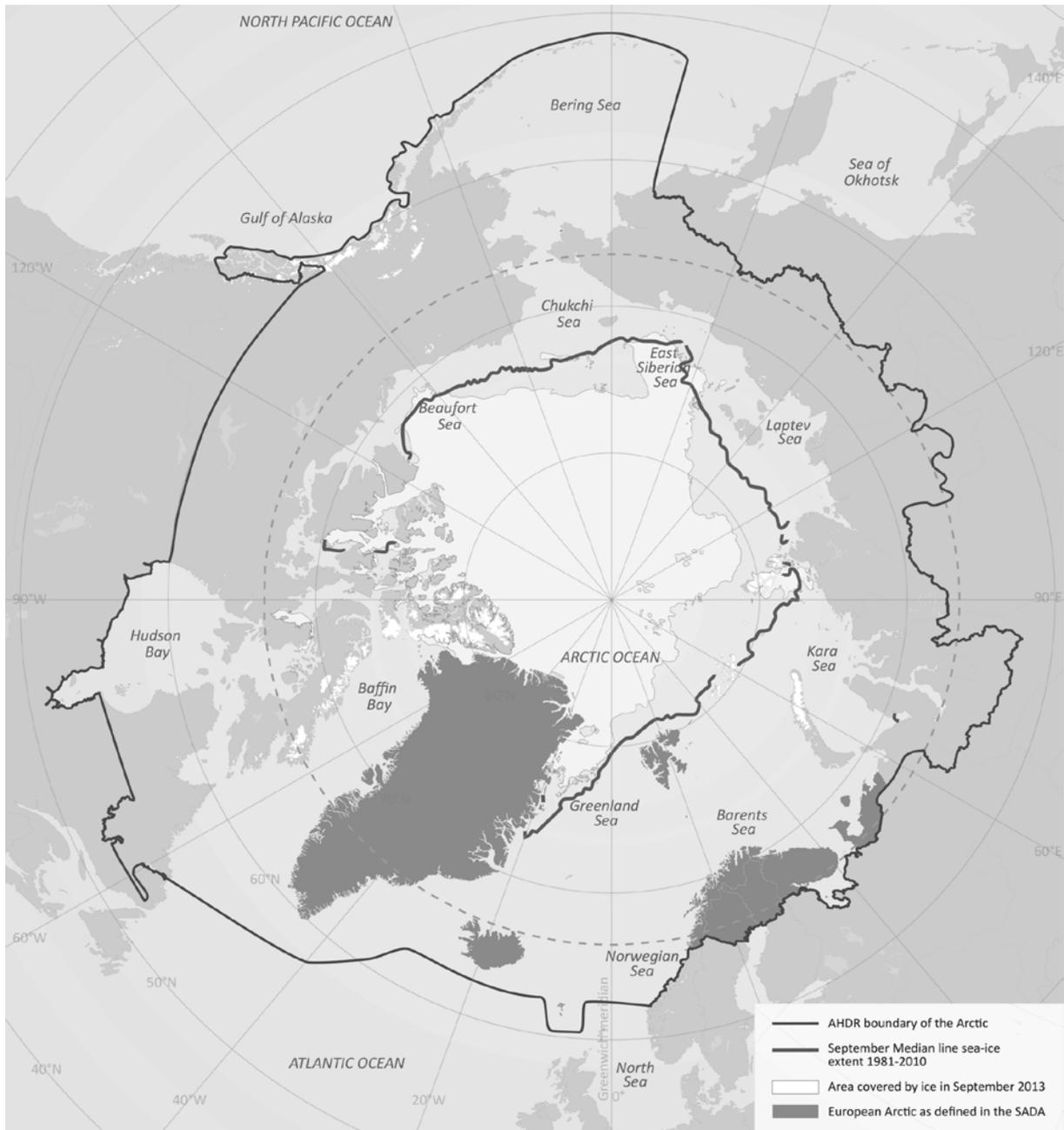
³ After attending several AC ministerial meetings as ad hoc observer, the Commission officially applied, on behalf of the EU, for AC observer status in December 2008. However, predominantly due to (now solved) Canadian and (still existing) Russian concerns, official observer status has not yet been granted to the EU (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 91–92). However, the EU has obtained de facto observer status and the 'right to attend all AC meetings (...) without having to receive an invitation each time' (Garcés de los Fayos, 2015, p. 2).

2.1. A Strong European Legal Feature?

The return of a geopolitical Arctic in 2007/08 undoubtedly directed the EU's attention to the region. And yet, the area, in particular its European part, had already returned to the EU institutional and jurisdictional screen a decade earlier when Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995 and the EEA introduced a European single market area in 1994. Consequently, the EU's *acquis communautaire* covers an extensive area of the geographical European Arctic.⁴ Figure 1 visualises this geographical space, also including Greenland and parts of North-West Russia.

Figure 1: European Arctic as Defined in the Strategic Assessment of Development of the Arctic

⁴ The EU has pulled competences from its Member States and manages some policy areas at the supranational level. In some domains, the EU has exclusive competences, such as international trade or the conservation of living marine resources (e.g. allocating fishing quotas). In other areas, the EU shares competences with its Member States, for example regarding environment, energy, international transport, and European transport networks. If we consider part of EU policies operating in Northern Fennoscandia to constitute elements of the EU's Arctic policy, then virtually all policy domains mentioned above may be one way or another Arctic-relevant.



Source: (Stępień, Kankaanpää, & Koivurova, 2014, p. 4)

Thus, and from a state-centric perspective, five out of the eight Arctic states are EU/EEA states, namely Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Furthermore, the EU is, by virtue of its Member States and EEA relations, represented at the AC, either via the AC's Member States, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, or its observers, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, the Netherlands and Spain (Stępień & Koivurova, 2016, pp. 22–23). However, international emphasis concerning an active and politically participative role of the EU in the Arctic has been predominantly put on the geographical fact of the EU not having an actual European shoreline on the Arctic Ocean (Koivurova, Kokko, Duyck, Sellheim, & Stępień, 2012,

p. 361), which holds true after Greenland withdrew from the European Economic Community in 1985. And yet, this does not mean that EU law does not apply to the Arctic region.

Generally, many EU regulations and policies also affect the Arctic indirectly, via what could be called 'external governance'. First, Europe understood as a major global market, economy and population influences the Arctic environment and economy via pollution reaching the Arctic from Europe as well as owing to the European demand for Arctic resources. Second, the EU can influence the development of international norms that are of relevance for the Arctic. For instance, EU competences as regards maritime transport have made the Union an important actor in international negotiations on Arctic maritime navigation, leading for the example to the adoption of mandatory Polar Code standards. The European Commission ('Commission') is also one of the key players in international negotiations on the protection of biodiversity in the areas beyond national jurisdiction. This process can be of high importance for the future governance of the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO). Accordingly, the Union was among the few non-Arctic actors involved in the CAO fisheries agreement negotiations (Schatz, Proelss, & Liu, 2019). Other international regimes that should be mentioned are climate change related ones as well as instruments dedicated to long-range pollution, such as the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), where the EU can influence the placing of new POPs on the list of substances to be eliminated or restricted. The negotiations on the conservation and management of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction would ideally lead to facilitating the establishment of effective marine protected areas in high seas, potentially also in the Arctic. The EU is an active participant to these negotiations. Third, the EU may have a certain impact on entities operating in the Arctic. For instance, the EU can set rules for maritime traffic via its Member States' port state and flag state authorities – which rules are applicable to all vessels travelling via the Arctic and calling at European ports (Liu, 2013). Another example is the 2013 offshore oil and gas safety regulation, which obliges companies registered in EU Member States to report any accidents taking place on their installations, even if such accidents take place outside European waters.

Additionally, the EU can influence the European Arctic through its various funding schemes. EU structural programmes are important for Finnish and Swedish regions, which struggle to

overcome limitations arising from long distances and sparse population. EU-supported cross-border co-operation programmes such as the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme operate across the region, including Greenland. Cooperation with Russia is facilitated by cross-border programmes, especially the Kolarctic Programme and via four Northern Dimension (ND) partnerships. Moreover, the EU provides support for the development of education and training in Greenland as a part of the EU-Greenland Partnership Agreement. European Arctic regions are also directly affected by the EU's environmental, transport, energy or competition legislation. The Natura 2000 network, the Habitats and Bird Directives have established a strong conservation framework for vast tracks of European Arctic ecosystems. Policies supporting renewable energy developments contribute to the facilitation of wind power investments in the North. EU legislation also influences the environmental performance of mining industry in Northern Fennoscandia,⁵ for instance via rules on waste management or chemicals.

2.2. The EU and its Ecologic Arctic Footprint

Over the last decade(s) the Arctic has experienced substantial climate change – with warming twice the average global rate – that essentially impinges upon the physical and biological conditions of the circumpolar North. Eventually, the continuing loss of Arctic (sea) ice and climate feedback loops will only act as a catalyst for regional transformation in the years and decades to come with threats to human and species' habitats – inside and outside the Arctic. The EU's original interest in the Arctic was essentially related to environmental changes taking place in the region, and primarily to climate impacts. As a matter of fact, the Commission's very first Communication on Arctic matters in 2008 highlights the EU's responsibility for its distinct Arctic environmental footprint (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 134). Climate change mitigation is still what chiefly contributes to maintaining the flame of attention under the EU Arctic policy pot, *see* Section 3. Changes in the Arctic are believed to have a significant influence on Europe, including on weather patterns and precipitation with Northern Fennoscandia being among the fastest warming parts of the continent. Implications are also expected to have ramifications for European economy and resource markets. Thus, understanding Arctic environmental change is perceived as crucial (Stępień, Koivurova, & Kankaanpää, 2016). At

⁵ Fennoscandia means Finland, Norway and Sweden, with a different geographical scope than Nordic or Scandinavian states. The term may also be related to the geological formation of the Fennoscandian Shield, which also includes Russian Karelia, the Murmansk region and the Kola Peninsula.

the same time, the EU's impacts on the Arctic environment constitute an important part of justification for the EU's status as an Arctic stakeholder. Thus, already in 2010, the Commission authorized a study to assess the EU's Arctic footprint and assess the effectiveness of relevant policies (Cavalieri et al., 2010).

Among the major industrialized regions of the Northern Hemisphere, Europe is the closest to the Arctic. As a result, the continent is an important source of pollutants coming from outside of the region. For instance, a quarter of mercury reaching the Arctic from southern latitudes is emitted within the EU. Various EU policies (e.g. POPs regulations) that influence European emissions of persistent organic pollutants, mercury, acidifying pollutants (Sulphur and nitrogen oxides) or short-live climate pollutants (black carbon and methane) can translate to the number of contaminants reaching Arctic environment via wind patterns and ocean currents. Additionally, around 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions originate in the EU, directly corresponding to the EU's responsibility for global, and thus also Arctic, heating (Boden, Marland, & Andres, 2017; Ritchie & Roser, 2017). Consequently, while in fact unrelated to any actions taken in the Arctic, the EU's climate action has become a key component of the Union's Arctic policy (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019b, pp. 1–2).

2.3. Watch your Step: An EU-Arctic Research Footprint

Both the EU and its Member States have been a major financial contributor, via its research programmes FP5 to FP7 and Horizon2020, to international research activities and the development of Arctic research infrastructure throughout the last decade. European research institutions, such as the German Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI) or the French Polar Institute Paul Emile Victor (IPEV) are among the most important actors in Arctic science. EU-funded research and the EU's support for Arctic monitoring and sustained observation significantly contributes to the better understanding of Arctic environmental and climate changes, and ultimately, towards safeguarding Arctic environment and understanding region's influence on the rest of the globe.⁶ EU research projects are also expected to support development and deployment of innovative technologies in the Arctic, which is one of the objectives of the EU's Arctic policy (European Commission & High Representative, 2016, p. 10). Within the current

⁶ EU space programmes and the EU's support for initiatives such as the Svalbard Integrated Arctic Earth Observing System or Sustaining Arctic Observing Networks (SAON) are important for Arctic observation and monitoring.

framework of Horizon 2020, the EU provides funding for a number of research projects dedicated to the Arctic or of high relevance for the Arctic. Among major EU-funded projects are APPLICATE⁷, aimed at enhancing weather and climate prediction capabilities or INTERACT⁸ which aims at coordinating Arctic research infrastructures. The EU also formed the EU-PolarNet,⁹ a network of European institutions with an aim to co-design an Integrated European Polar Research Programme and develop an Infrastructure Implementation Plan. Furthermore, EU-funded projects have joined forces in a network called the EU Arctic Cluster, responding to earlier calls for increased cooperation and synergy-seeking between substantially related projects.

2.4. Let's talk about Arctic Economy

In comparison to the replicable territorial, legal, environmental and research dimensions of EU Arctic presence, the economic stake of a related EU/Arctic nexus remains rather hypothetical. For one thing this can be accounted for by the vagueness of current and future Arctic economic development as such, but to a similar extent by the related, uncertain economic Arctic orientation of the EU.

By nature of its spatial proximity, Europe has always had some kind of economic influence on the broader Arctic region and exploited regional resources for centuries. The EU–Arctic economic picture is currently characterised by strong trade interdependencies between the EU and the Arctic states with the Union's single market covering an extensive part of the European Arctic. Generally, the EU has a variety of economic regional interest, including the potential for enhancing European energy, raw materials and food security. However, the EU Arctic policy statements fail to specifically assess and pronounce these interests. That may be partly a communicative choice, as the EU does not want to present itself as an actor interested primarily in securing access to Arctic resources.

At the same time, the European demand for Arctic living and non-living resources is one of the factors driving feasibility and profitability of their exploitation. For instance, the EU accounts for 30-40% of fish imports from Arctic countries, and 24% of final demand for

⁷ <https://applicat.eu>

⁸ <https://eu-interact.org>

⁹ <https://www.eu-polar.net>

products from the Arctic oil and gas industry (Cavalieri et al., 2010) . Various EU policies may affect the level of this demand and – less likely – encourage or hinder the level in which that demand is satisfied specifically by Arctic resources. For instance, EU action on climate change could in the long-term affect European demand for Arctic hydrocarbons, while at the same time able to increase the demand for various minerals necessary for renewable energy expansion – many of which are extracted or deposited in Arctic bedrocks. The EU’s influence could also entail setting examples of standards and best practices. This becomes of particular importance as increasing number of countries call for defining Arctic standards for different activities. However, the EU’s sway in the Arctic will be rather limited, as generally Arctic actors have confidence in their own expertise and governance frameworks.¹⁰

As visible from this section, the EU already has multiple links to the Arctic region. Referring to these ties as the ‘EU’s Arctic credentials’, a Commission official responsible for Arctic affairs emphasised that the EU is part of the Arctic, linked to the Arctic and simultaneously affects and is affected by the Arctic.¹¹ Østhagen consensually stressed that ‘it can be argued that the EU is by all means an Arctic actor’ (2013, p. 86). Similarly, Bailes (2010, p. 220) underlined that the EU’s stakes in the region do not ‘stand or fall just on calculations of geo-strategic [namely, geographical] presence’. And yet, how to justify ones Arctic dimension and communicate its interests?

3. Justifying its Arctic Presence: The EU’s Arctic Policy Documents

Ever since 2008, the EU and its various institutional actors have slowly but steadily developed a dedicated EU Arctic policy, setting common positions, stressing the Union’s Arctic credentials and prominently expressing its very own ‘Arcticness’ – the multifaceted, nonetheless intrinsically connected dimensions of EU–Arctic, Arctic–EU entanglement (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 65–85), with reference to many aspects discussed in the previous section.¹²

¹⁰ To a certain extent this limitation aspect also holds true for the EU’s market power as only Norway, in terms of oil and gas, and Greenland and Iceland, as regards fisheries, are primarily dependent on the EU market.

¹¹ Policy officer, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European Commission, interview conducted in Brussels on 4 September 2012.

¹² It is important to note that the EU’s multidimensional Arctic presence also gives an indication of the diverse meaning of both the ‘EU in the Arctic’, as well as ‘the EU’ as an international actor. Accordingly, ‘the EU’ can not only signify, *inter alia*, a strong market and economy community, a source of regulations, a combination of its three main institutional bodies, but also the grouping of its Member States.

And yet the region has not achieved a prominent place on the EU's both domestic and foreign policy table over the last two decades (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019b). At the turn of the millennium, EU–Arctic deliberations lacked momentum, despite strengthened physical regional presence, for example through the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) where the Commission had become a full member, the accession of Finland and Sweden and the related development of the ND¹³, and continuing cooperation efforts with Russia (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 87–89). It was particularly the ND – first as an EU umbrella framework, then after 2006 as a joint policy between the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia – and its ‘Arctic window’ that could have been used more extensively to raise Arctic awareness within the EU's institutional framework in order to enshrine the region in the EU's political agenda (Weber, 2014, p. 48).¹⁴ However, before 2007/2008, the Arctic remained ‘a marginal note in EU foreign policy – a periphery of the periphery’ (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 91).

It was only the summer/autumn events of 2007 – with a Russian flag being planted more than 4000 m beneath the North Pole, and a record low in the average extent of Arctic sea ice – that began to spark Arctic debate in the institutional corridors of Brussels. As noted by Hix, ‘EU foreign policies are essentially reactive rather than proactive: responding to global events rather than shaping them’ (2005, p. 398). The contours of a such a ‘reactive’ Arctic approach became evident in 2008, when the Commission issued its first Communication on The European Union and the Arctic Region, preceded by a HR/Commission joint paper on Climate Change and International Security (High Representative & European Commission, 2008) and an EP Resolution on Arctic Governance (European Parliament, 2008). Thus, the year 2008 might be taken as the official starting point for the EU's Arctic storyline.

However, in contrast to the European north and its plethora of international regimes where the EU is seen as a key partner, the mandate and role for the EU in the Arctic (and the AC) is

¹³ Between 1999 and 2006, the ND was an EU umbrella policy aimed at facilitating synergies between different EU policies and instruments applicable to cooperation in Northern Europe. From 2006 onwards, the ND was reformulated as a joint policy between the EU, Iceland, Norway and Russia, with common budget and objectives, implemented via four sectoral partnerships.

¹⁴ The ND's Arctic window turned out to mean not much more than Greenland, Iceland and the northernmost Norwegian regions became part of the ND. Rather than a pillar of the EU's Arctic policy, the ND itself remains an element of a broader framework established or co-created by the EU to maintain cooperative cross-border relations with Russia in northern Europe.

rather limited (Aalto, 2013, p. 102). Thus, and in order to express the EU’s very own ‘Arcticness’, the EU’s main institutions – the Commission, the Council of the European Union (hereinafter ‘Council’) and the European Parliament (EP) – have slowly been setting common positions since 2007/2008. To date, the list of EU Arctic policy documents includes ten policy documents (plus the above-mentioned joint policy statement on Climate Change and International Security from 14 March 2008), see Figure 2. Additionally, the Arctic region has also been cross-referenced in, *inter alia*, the Integrated Maritime Policy of 2007, the Maritime Security Strategy of 2014 and, most recently, in the 2016 Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union (Commission of the European Communities, 2007; Council of the European Union, 2014; High Representative, 2016).

Figure 2: The EU’s Arctic Policy Milestones, 2008-17

2008	HR and Commission Paper on Climate Change and International Security EP Resolution on Arctic governance Commission Communication on The European Union and the Arctic region
2009	Council Conclusions on Arctic issues
2011	EP Resolution on A sustainable EU policy for the High North
2012	Commission and HR Joint Communication on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps
2014	EP Resolution on the EU strategy for the Arctic Council Conclusions on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region
2016	Commission and HR Joint Communication on An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic Council Conclusions on the Arctic
2017	EP Resolution on An integrated EU policy for the Arctic

Source: (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 93)

Over the last decade, the EU has been able to communicate the scope of its regional presence and has generally demonstrated an ‘appropriate’ understanding of the region and its sensitivities. And yet, despite this institutional progress, no single Arctic strategy has been developed that would comprehensively guide EU Arctic action in all regionally relevant sectors and boost regional awareness in the centres of European power (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019a). Ten years after the 2008 Communication, the EU remains caught in an unconventional mix of internal, cross-border and external policies regarding the Arctic, blurring the line between what are perceived as domestic or foreign, internal or external, soft or hard politics. Eventually, the EU Arctic policy domain encompasses many issues, sectors and stakeholders, some interlinked, some connected only via an ‘Arctic’ label (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019a).

The most recent policy statement from the Commission and the HR is the Joint Communication on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic, published in 2016. The document was an attempt to emphasise the most important areas of EU engagement – after the 2012 Joint Communication trying to mention all issues that could be considered Arctic-relevant in the EU policy system. The 2016 Joint Communication also received strong political support. The document was launched by the High Representative (HR) Federica Mogherini and the Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella. Nonetheless, the Communication remained primarily an overview of existing policies and actions, with only few aspects being future-oriented (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019b, p. 1). For instance, the EU proposed the European northernmost regions to work on key investment and research priorities for the Arctic, as well as launched a new EU-Arctic meeting place, the annual Arctic Stakeholder Conference. The lack of a long-term vision and limited number of future-oriented actions led to calls for adopting a more ambitious Arctic policy framework, urging the Commission and the HR to propose a new policy in the coming years (European Political Strategy Centre, 2019).

The EU's regional commitment has also fluctuated over the last decade as more pressing issues have arisen on Europe's agenda. Largely, the Arctic is only of peripheral concern for EU policymakers. This leaves the Arctic as a niche policy domain, dominated by special interests ranging from environmental protection to fisheries, from Indigenous Peoples' rights to regional development in Northern Fennoscandia. In a way, it is the democratic deficit turned on its head. Few pay attention to one-off controversial statements by national politicians in Arctic states, especially when these are non-official or issued in Russian or a Scandinavian language. Yet, as soon as Members of the EP state that a moratorium on Arctic oil and gas should be implemented, strong northern reactions are guaranteed. Usually, these strong reactions depend on the specific context they are embedded in. Strongest voices are those of Norwegian and at times Icelandic actors, who have a special relationship with the EU decision-making via the EEA. Not being able to vote on the single market rules that are applicable to these two countries, Iceland and Norway conduct pre-emptive EU diplomacy, influencing policy developments at the earliest levels or attempting to prevent undesirable notions to surface even in non-binding documents out of fear that loose statements affect legislative processes later on (Østhagen & Raspotnik, 2017). Norwegian diplomats have been particularly

skilled, active and effective in carrying out such a strategy (Wegge, 2012). Other strong reactions to the EU Arctic policy relate to the position of the EU as a market for Arctic resources. It may be about the – implemented – ban on seal products or about the remote possibility of setting special standards for Arctic resources imported into the single market.¹⁵ In all such cases, the concern of Arctic actors is that the environmentally-focused EU Arctic policy would result in limitations of placing Arctic resources on the EU market. At the same time, the produce of other regions – unaffected by the environmental symbolism associated with the Arctic – would be free from such limitations and take place of current and future Arctic resources in EU market.

4. An Arcticness of many colours

The nature of the EU's 'Arctic actorness' differs significantly between two distinct but interrelated dimensions: the European Arctic and the circumpolar Arctic. These two (idealised) dimensions are both of geographical and substantial character, as they are associated with different set of policy sectors.

The European Arctic policy space is characterised by direct application of EU laws and policies or the operation of EU cross-border and intra-regional programmes. The geographical definition of the European Arctic – defined as a region stretching from Greenland to northwest Russia (see Figure 1) – is fluid from the EU's perspective. The further from Rovaniemi (Finland) and Luleå (Sweden) one travels, the weaker the EU's influence, and the fewer the European Arctic linkages. These 'linkages' range from full coverage of the EU *acquis communautaire* and policies in Finland and Sweden, to thin cross-border and ND programme cooperation in northwest Russia. Substantially, European Arctic issues within the Arctic policy are largely terrestrial. They comprise, for example, transport in northern Europe, environmental policies and regulations, local climate adaptation, regional development and the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship. International cooperation within the European Arctic space is primarily about cross-border and programme.

¹⁵ By adopting its Regulation 1007/2009, the EU banned seal products, imported for commercial purposes from its internal market. This led to controversial legal and political debate in Arctic international circles, especially with regard to the EU's broader support of Arctic indigenous issues, eventually negatively affecting the EU's application for AC observer status (Sellheim, 2015b, 2015a; Wegge, 2013).

In contrast, circumpolar matters are chiefly of maritime and international in character, relate to maritime shipping, ocean governance and the Arctic Ocean's high seas. This circumpolar dimension also covers the EU's environmental footprint, including general climate change mitigation and long-range pollution, neither of which are Arctic-specific. The circumpolar Arctic dimension is to a great extent related to the EU's external action, including the EU's involvement in the AC as a *de facto* observer and the participation in Arctic-relevant international processes, such as the instruments for POPs or for Arctic shipping.

The EU is indisputably one of the key policy actors in the European Arctic, source of regulation, funding and the facilitator of networks of cooperation. In the circumpolar Arctic, with the exception of science, the EU is an important but clearly a secondary actor. The Union takes part in various processes, but usually as a back-seat supporter or a party invited by the Arctic states, as was the case for the CAO fisheries agreement (Schatz et al., 2019). In the context of policy fields related to European Arctic dimensions, the EU is generally accepted as an 'Arctic actor'. In the circumpolar framing, the EU may be seen as a guest or intruder and its interest may be unrecognized or even considered illegitimate – something unthinkable in the European Arctic context. This leads to contradictory voices among analysts and stakeholders as they try to make sense of the EU's Arctic identity and presence, *see for example* (De Botselier, Piqueres, & Schunz, 2018; Kobza, 2015; Offerdal, 2011; Østhagen, 2013; Raspotnik, 2018; Stępień, 2015; Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019b).

The research and Arctic scientific cooperation sector stands out as a policy field – it is circumpolar in scope but Europe's role here is hardly secondary, owing to the key role of European research institutions in Arctic science and substantial EU Arctic research funding. The EU's role as a co-organiser of the Second Arctic Ministerial Meeting in Berlin in October 2018 is a good example of the general acknowledgment of the EU as an Arctic research actor. Even so, Arctic states treated the EU as an outsider as they adopted the Agreement on the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation (May 2017), which was agreed between the eight Arctic states.

Based on the EU's involvement in sustainable development issues in the European Arctic, one would assume that the EU could be included in the discussions on sustainable development

in the circumpolar context, for example in best practice sharing. That is rarely a case as it may be considered inappropriate for the EU to discuss the development of Arctic communities outside the European Arctic. This is due the symbolic rejection of the EU as an Arctic actor via not awarding the Union with a formal observer status in the AC, which can be seen as Arctic states' acknowledgment of actors' legitimate and accepted interests in the region. This rejection was related originally to the ban on the placing of seal products on the EU's single market, after which the EU policymakers were accused of lack of understanding of Arctic livelihoods and values, and pushing their own value systems on Arctic communities through the use of the EU's market power.

Further, it is interesting to compare the EU with two of its Arctic Member States. Finland and Sweden are broadly acknowledged as Arctic actors and are fully integrated into Arctic international cooperation structures, even without having access to the Arctic Ocean. This recognition of Arctic actorness goes so far that these states appear to be accepted as having certain stakes, expertise and credibility as regards Arctic marine issues, offshore resource extraction and navigational matters, even though they have no sovereignty over any Arctic waters. Their Arctic identity and AC membership translated for example to their participation in the two binding agreements on search and rescue (SAR) and oil spills.¹⁶ If Arctic identity had not become the requirement to occupy the first-row spot at the Arctic table, the EU (but also China) would probably have been integrated in more Arctic-specific processes. The exception is when the lack of involvement of non-Arctic actors would have translated to ineffectiveness of Arctic states actions, especially in terms of activities that constitute freedoms of the seas, with the Polar Code and CAO fisheries agreement being the most prominent examples.¹⁷

The challenge for EU policymakers is that these two policy spaces – the European and the circumpolar one – often become conflated. Looking from outside, the EU is sometimes seen as a key Arctic actor, sometimes as an annoying guest. Within the EU, the discourses related

¹⁶ The scope of these agreements was in fact adjusted so that Finland and Sweden could be parties by making aeronautical search and rescue an element of SAR Agreement and including the Gulf of Bothnia into the oil spills agreement.

¹⁷ Although even in these cases, the Arctic states managed to play a key role or acted as gate keepers: it was the five Arctic coastal states that invited other actors to the CAO negotiations, and it was the AC's AMSA report of that served as one of the triggers for the efforts within the International Maritime Organization to make the Polar shipping guidelines into a mandatory set of standards.

to the two spaces are often divergent: the circumpolar space has usually greater environmental focus, while the European Arctic is more about economic (albeit ideally sustainable) development. The environmental focus of EU documents, referring to circumpolar questions, is a cause of concern for Europe's northernmost regions, anxious that their developmental ambitions fall victim to Arctic environmental label.¹⁸ In turn, developmental statements (investments, entrepreneurship, resources) referring to the European Arctic may be difficult to accept for a part of the broader EU public, when these utterances are read in the context of polar bears and melting (sea) ice rather than declining countryside of Finnmark, Lapland and Norrbotten.

To conclude, mixing European Arctic and circumpolar Arctic spaces/dimensions of the EU's Arctic policy often results in misunderstanding the Union's regional policy by Arctic stakeholders. The challenge of bringing together different Arctic-relevant EU policies and actions would be eased if the policy objectives and the EU's role in these two interconnected but distinct policy areas were clarified (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2019a).

5. A new decade of EU Arcticness ahead

So, what is the role the EU can play in the Arctic in the decade to come? Its direct role in the circumpolar Arctic is restricted, its moral attitude regionally questioned, however its funding mechanisms well perceived. Basically, the EU's Arctic role centres around two related concepts: engage and comprehend. In terms of engagement, the EU should continue to actively participate in Arctic discussions, aiming to play by the Arctic rulebook, as well as intensify its efforts in its very own European Arctic. This relates in particular to issues such as regional investment efforts – the sustainable development of Northern Fennoscandia – as well as the Union's financial commitment to Arctic research.

However, the key to Arctic access lies in terms of comprehension, especially within the European policymaking circle. At times, decisions-makers are either surprisingly uninformed about the Arctic region or unsurprisingly ignorant about its challenges and global ramifications. Given that the north constitutes one of three essential regional neighbourhoods

¹⁸ Authors' observation of meetings related to the EU Arctic policy and regional development: Brussels, September 2014; Brussels, May 2016; Luosto, Finland, May 2016; Brussels, November 2017; Brussels, November 2018.

of direct geopolitical relevance to the EU (the east and the south being the two others), grasping its dynamics and complexities should obviously be a priority. However, to properly grasp its own Arcticness, it is essential to eventually define its interest along the geographic/legal dimensions of regional activity – the European/circumpolar Arctic divide.

Eventually, protecting its Arctic interests goes beyond the use of popular catchphrases and fancy statements, but demands both a clear understanding of the different Arctic regions' manifold challenges and its own competences to tackle these developments, as well as comprehensible action efforts, both within and beyond European borders.

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