

“Northern Dimensions - Expanding Circumpolar Cooperation”

A report on a Symposium that was held in Brussels on June 3-4, 2004, and hosted jointly by the Northern Research Forum, the Canadian Embassy in Finland and the Canadian Mission to the EU

Introduction

The forward-looking move to identify a ‘Northern Dimension’ in government policies indicates the value governments and institutions place on their Northern territories. The Northern Dimension of Canada’s Foreign Policy (NDFP) and the 2nd EU Northern Dimension Action Plan are examples of well-defined policy priorities for the North. Russia and Norway, apart from having a role in both the policies of the EU and Canada, are in the process of formulating their own northern frameworks. By singling out a Northern Dimension, these policies reflect the growing awareness of the unique opportunities and challenges in the North.

While Northern Dimension policies have inherent value in organizing domestic North-South relationships, little has been done to examine how these policies can work together to achieve shared goals and objectives. What each policy has in common is that the geographic region has implications to the Arctic and North Atlantic as well as North America and Russia. This interesting cooperative context should mean value added to each Northern Dimension policy.

The Event

Towards these ends, the *Northern Research Forum* in cooperation with the *Canadian Mission to the EU* and *Canadian Embassy in Helsinki* brought together 25 experts – politicians, policy makers, researchers, non-governmental organizations – to compare and discuss northern policies, how they relate to each other and what issues or areas these policies overlook. The Symposium took place in Brussels on June 3-4, 2004.

The roundtable was organized into four thematic sessions with 20 minute keynote addresses followed by open discussion:

- 1) The Northern Dimension of Canada’s Foreign Policy
Keynote speaker: Ambassador Jack Anawak, Canada’s Ambassador for Circumpolar Affairs
- 2) EU’s Northern Dimension and Beyond – Expanding the Boundaries
Keynote speaker: Mr. Alistair MacDonald, Head of Unit, DG External Relations, European Commission
- 3) EU-Russia Relations in the Context of the Northern Dimension
Keynote speakers: Dr. Nicola Catellani, Professor, Bologna University
Dr. Zaneta Ozolina, Professor, University of Latvia.
- 4) The North-South Relationship Within the Northern Dimensions
Keynote speaker: Dr. Tarja Cronberg, Member of the Finnish Parliament

The roundtable was chaired by Dr. Lassi Heininen.

This report reflects the over-all discussion which took place under Chatham House Rule.

Symposium Objectives

The organizers had set six goals to guide the discussion:

- 1) To explore and expose the policy gaps among the different Northern Dimension policies and to search for common grounds and cooperative paths;
- 2) To activate Trans-Atlantic contacts by launching a proposal for a network between Northern Dimension policies, for example at Canada-EU and Russia-EU Summits;
- 3) To advocate for a new approach for North-South relationship via Northern Dimension;
- 4) To strengthen the connections between circumpolar cooperation (especially the Arctic Council) and transnational and inter-regional cooperation between Europe, North America and Russia;
- 5) To increase knowledge and interest about contemporary issues in the circumpolar north within the EU;

6) To promote an on-going dialogue between the research community and decision-makers.

Discussion falling under objectives 1 to 4 will be summarized below.

Objectives 5 and 6 provided context for the discussions that took place at the Symposium. The format worked very well as participants engaged in open and frank discussion in each of the four thematic sessions. The organizers hope that the Symposium will serve as a model for dialogue between the EU and other northern interests as well as between research community and policy makers.

Explore and expose the policy gaps among the different Northern Dimensions and to search for common grounds and cooperative paths

While the “North” of Canada, Europe and Russia all have their distinct features, the underlying issues are generally the same. The Northern Dimension of Canada’s Foreign Policy (NDFP) was praised by European participants -- it is evident that Canada’s leadership and interest in the North plays an important role in Europe. Canada’s active participation in Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being and the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership were recognized as important examples of engagement. The Canada-EU Partnership Agenda’s provides another policy platform for Canada and Europe to explore areas of shared interest while benefiting the broader cooperative region.

As in Canada, the EU’s 2nd Northern Dimension Action Plan (NDAP) is an external and cross-border policy framework where the EU Commission’s Directorate General for External Relations (DG RELEX), has the “leading role” in implementation of the Union’s Northern Dimension Policy. Internal EU matters, northern or not, are handled elsewhere within the Commission. However, there is a conceptual tension – with practical implications – between the “North” of the EU’s NDAP and Canada’s NDFP. In Canada, North equals circumpolar and Arctic, while the European Union framework clearly focusses on Russia and the Baltic Sea States. The Arctic Window is reflected in the 2nd Action Plan and it is the thread that supposedly ties the far North into the EU’s foundation. Indeed, the EU Northern Dimension 2nd Action Plan aims to mainstream the Arctic into all of the policy – is that enough and how does this play out in practical terms?

Symposium participants expressed concern about whether the EU’s NDAP has real influence on northern issues especially now, in the enlarged EU. It was also questioned, whether in practical terms the EU’s NDAP has been reduced to solely cover Northwest Russia with little or no interest to anything else although it is perceived as a regional policy in North Europe. The initial idea behind the Northern Dimension was not limited to Northwest Russia. As first proposed by Finland in 1997, the Northern Dimension policy was intended to be a truly multi-dimensional policy for the EU as a whole and aimed at cooperation with Russia and other non-EU countries in North Europe on a multilateral level. As adopted, however, the Northern Dimension, focussing on the external and cross-border policies of the EU, has – according to some -- been reduced to much less, although the Commission maintains that it has simply been more specific, and the recent enlargement of the Union has meant that the Northern Dimension is now focussed largely on relations with Northwest Russia. The Northern Dimension pointing to the Northeast and the Barcelona Process pointing towards the South are two official, external cross-border policies of the EU. While the two are quite different from each other, they both have strategic importance for the EU. In exploration of the EU’s NDAP as a process rather than policy, some participants observed that whereas it is easy to point to policy failures, processes do not receive adequate appreciation. For example, there is growing awareness of the issues and problems facing Northwest Russia – without the EU Northern Dimension, this would not be the case. In this regard, a policy formulation exercise, like that of the NDAP, can lead to a process which can facilitate action.

Due to some last minute cancellations by Russian participants, the Symposium was not able to address the topic of Russian Northern Policy as fully as desired. Several participants, however, noted President Putin’s recent positive remarks on Russia’s commitment towards developing a long-term northern policy. Russia plays an important role in the EU’s NDAP and is one of five policy pillar’s in Canada’s NDFP. In the EU context, it was noted that Russian enthusiasm for participating in the implementation of NDAP seems to be in some respect diminishing. On the other hand, Russia is deeply committed to the two created ND-partnerships. It was noted that Russia has been interested in Northern Dimension partnership programs, whereby Western donors put up money to tackle pressing problems in Russia. One example is the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership administered by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Nuclear and environmental issues are extremely important in the Russian context

and strong efforts must be made in order to keep Russia engaged. Both Canadian and European participants expressed the desire to explore practical mechanisms to enhance northern partnerships with Russia.

Similarly, participants raised the concern over limited engagement of the United States, both in Alaska and the capital, Washington DC. Connections and cooperation should be explored –within the context of the United States' Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) Program. The e-PINE is a framework for U.S. activity within and in cooperation with the eight Nordic and Baltic States (thus not including Russia) with three broad areas of focus: cooperative security, healthy societies and vibrant economies.

Key points raised by different participants

- Canada's commitment and leadership in the North can potentially have far-reaching effects for the region as a whole. This is discussed again below in the context of Trans-Atlantic contacts.
- The definition of the North is different in Canada and North America than in Europe which presents obstacles in the pursuit of practical cooperation.
- The "Arctic Window" of the EU's NDAP needs to be strengthened to better tie the circumpolar into the overall European policy framework.
- The EU's NDAP post-enlargement is focussed on Northwest Russia. In the future, stakeholders must work out how the NDAP could be widened as a policy framework.
- Russia and the United States should be better engaged vis-a-vis the North.

Activate Trans-Atlantic contacts by launching a proposal for a network between the Northern Dimension policies, for example at Canada-EU and Russia-EU summits

The Arctic provides a natural Trans-Atlantic link to the EU Northern Dimension – but is the Arctic Window as currently utilized, too small a peep-hole to really advance this connection? As far as the eight circumpolar states are concerned, the five Nordics and Canada are quite unified in commitment and in focus. One of the most discussed topics of the Symposium was about how to engage Russia and the United States more thoroughly in northern dimension co-operation.

As major global powers, both Russia and the United States set their political agendas differently from their northern neighbours. Big power politics tend to play a key role and as a rule, global overrules regional. Therefore, engaging the big powers in the regional context will depend on how the region fits into their global agenda. The other regional actors – states, organizations and NGOs – should be proactive in directing the global focus towards the region. It is likely that increased cooperation between the United States and Russia is emerging especially in relation to energy and oil. The other Northern partners, including the EU, must remain hands-on in the development of this relationship.

As a G8-member and a Trans-Atlantic partner, Canada can potentially function as a catalyst between the bigger powers in enhancing Trans-Atlantic focus on the northern agenda. Symposium participants firmly believe that there is added value for the EU as well as the individual states, including Russia and the United States to collaborate in making the North an important part of Trans-Atlantic agenda.

The partnership programs in Health and the Environment in which the EU, Canada, Russia and others participate in are examples of one form of cooperation. However, the Trans-Atlantic connection and the northern agenda should be enhanced. More concretely, the United States and Canada would ideally have closer ties to the 2nd Northern Dimension Action Plan. Similarly, the Canada-EU and United States-EU Summits should always include the North in the agenda. Regularizing discussions on northern cooperation at Trans-Atlantic Summits could help to re-invigorate enthusiasm for Russian participation in the EU's NDAP. Participation of all eight circumpolar countries plus the EU in all the regional organizations would be desirable – if not as members, then at least in the capacity of observers. This way the North could be better managed as one entity with better coordination and less repetition.

Key points raised by different participants:

- Circumpolar countries should be engaged in all levels of northern cooperation.
- The Trans-Atlantic connection is extremely important for the North.
- The United States and Canada should be better connected to the EU NDAP.

Advocate for a new approach for North-South relationship via Northern Dimension Policies

The problems related to the North-South dialogue became particularly illustrative in connection to resource management and environmental threats. To put it bluntly in the future the North is facing a very real fear that the South will come up and take the resources leaving the waste and pollutants behind. Similarly, the North is in continued danger of being viewed as a scientific laboratory for environmental hazards, especially those connected with global change. The key question is how best to sustainably develop the Arctic resource while taking into consideration that it is a living region and promote change into a knowledge base?

The oil and gas industry in the Barents Sea and West Siberia as well as the northern passages as potential new routes for transportation are directly connected to global resource issues influenced by serious financial considerations, continuing terrorist threats and implications of instability in the Middle East. Therefore, the Russian part of the Barents Sea is likely to become a key area in future resource configurations, especially oil and gas. The Symposium agreed that these big, sensitive issues should be higher up in the political agenda. Oil exploration and transport issues link the Circumpolar Region into the global agenda. This should be managed with care and with contribution from the local inhabitants.

The Circumpolar Region is also on the global agenda in terms of environmental assessment. International environmental organizations already know to focus on the Arctic, especially regarding POPs, climate change issues and sustainable development. The engagement of Arctic peoples on POPs as well as on climate change issues have played a crucial role in raising international awareness and more importantly, have already brought some concrete results. The message is clear: In the Arctic climate change is happening now, not in the distant future!

In the context of Arctic resources and environmental threats, the Symposium again expressed serious concerns about Russia's future relationship with the rest of the region. The issues Russia is facing are the same ones for the region: resource development, especially oil and gas; opening of shipping routes; and environmental and social changes due to the impacts of climate change.

As the circumpolar world anxiously awaits the ACIA (*Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*) report, the impact of the *Arctic Council Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution of the Arctic* (ACAP) is subjected to scrutiny. Questions were raised about as to whether the Arctic Council with its current structure is able to deliver what is needed to implement the recommendations anticipated in the ACIA. Although this was never the intended role for the Arctic Council in the first place, the seriousness of the subject matter calls attention to the fact that there may not exist an appropriate body to carry to work forward. It was suggested that given the seriousness of the issues facing the Arctic, alternatives to the current decision-making bodies should be considered. What are the appropriate instruments/vehicles to deal with these enormous issues that influence human, social and resource base of the whole region? What can be done regarding the pace and impacts of climate change? Is there need for a mechanisms beyond the current structure of regional organizations that could better ensure that the core issues facing the Arctic are taken seriously? It would be timely to consider alternative ways for decision making. Is it not time to consider an Arctic Convention with binding commitments?

With the publishing of ACIA, the Circumpolar Region will once again come out as the "Arctic test laboratory" for the public eye. The Symposium spent a substantial amount of time discussing the problems related to how scientific research is undertaken in the region. Whereas scientific research is necessary, there was a general feeling that Arctic has been exploited in the name of 'science' over the years. Unlike the South Pole or the Antarctic, the Circumpolar Region is the home of indigenous peoples and northerners with unique identities, languages and cultures – and nobody should live in a test lab. Whatever scientific research takes place in the Arctic Region in the future, it should be conducted under set rules and in consultation with the local population, with the results benefiting the local population. Participants agreed that the science base must be strengthened and enhanced with the local, indigenous knowledge.

As is evident in the case of climate change, the South needs the North in order to understand the world; the Arctic voice is needed everywhere. This human perspective lead the Symposium to address the issue

of identity. It was suggested that given the magnitude of issues the Arctic is dealing with – many of which are overlapping – the human perspective with a strong indigenous voice should be the common thread guiding problem solving. In the fall of 2004 two important reports will come out, the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) and the ACIA Report, both include a strong human perspective. The AHDR may prove to play an important role in directing the focus on the human elements vis-a-vis scientific research. The report needs active follow-up such as public hearings in the northern communities.

Some participants suggested a specific Arctic Fund would be useful in addressing northern questions, including identity and/or identities. The question about Arctic identity translates to the question of how to strengthen an Arctic voice outside the region. The Arctic voice includes the indigenous voice; it is overlapping, but the two are not the same. Indigenous peoples play an important role in the Circumpolar Region and they should be taken into account in all circumpolar matters. The Arctic Council does exemplary work on this front, and the Sami have commended the treatment of indigenous views in the EU's ND policy.

Russian indigenous peoples, represented by RAIPON, have their own special situation. President Putin's recent speeches promising commitment for Russia's indigenous peoples has been warmly welcomed. In practice, however, indigenous groups have found it difficult to identify with whom and at what level cooperation really should happen. It was inquired also whether RAIPON could have a special dialogue with the EU Commission on issues relevant to them; the Commission noted that it is always willing to listen to indigenous groups, but suggested that grassroots contacts might be the most effective.

Key points raised by different participants

- Resource and environmental issues are connected in the Circumpolar Region and in the global arena.
- There is need to discuss the value of a future Arctic instrument, a convention or a regime, to address the sensitive issues of the future.
- The Arctic cannot -- and the northern peoples are not willing to -- act as an uncontrolled test laboratory to the rest of the world.
- The human perspective and Arctic identities must be in the forefront of the future debates.
- The North - South relationship is not a question of strict definitions although it deals with borders by necessity – but should be treated as a flexible concept that may be scientifically interesting and politically fruitful to explore.

Strengthen the connections between circumpolar cooperation (especially the Arctic Council) and transnational and inter-regional cooperation between Europe, North America and Russia.

Diminishing policy gaps between different northern policies can only be achieved through on-going dialogue. State players as well as international and regional organizations operating in the region need to seek better methods of cooperation in an effort to identify strengths and weaknesses in each respective policy. It was generally agreed that lack of coordination still exists among the regional organizations - the Arctic Council, Baltic Euro-Arctic Council, Nordic Council/Nordic Council of Ministers and Council of the Baltic Sea States - more so than among the active state actors. Given the fact that each of the regional organization has a specific mandate that holds inherent value to the region, it was questioned whether there may be need for an umbrella forum to coordinate and to synergise the work.

The Arctic Council, although not the main theme of the Symposium, was discussed critically throughout the seminar, although each critical point was countered by praise for its achievements. The Arctic Council's inherent value as an environmental organization and as a regional forum where indigenous peoples are key participants cannot be overlooked. But whereas it was noted that the four working groups on environment do important work, the Working Group on Sustainable Development has thus far failed to leave a lasting impression on the region. Most importantly the Arctic Council's ability to be more effective is hindered by its fundamental structural limitations, especially the lack of permanent funding and secretariat.

Several participants felt that the Arctic Council should evolve into a "proper organization" so that it can be effective in advancing the well-being of the region. Similarly, while it was acknowledged that the Standing Committee of the Parliamentarians in the Arctic Region is active in advocating regional issues, in many states the Arctic and the Arctic Council are seen as distant from the core of political decision-making. The North has to be better placed within domestic, regional and international agenda to gain the political

backing necessary to address the most pressing issues facing the region. It was generally agreed that the region needs a forum or platform with a strong policy perspective and ideally the Arctic Council could evolve into that organization. Similarly, the Arctic Council's potential role in strengthening the Trans-Atlantic link between the EU and North America was discussed.

Key points raised by different participants

- Possible need to continue discussion on the regional organizations' need for better coordination, potentially in the form of an umbrella forum.
- The Arctic Council should evolve into a proper organization in order to be able to facilitate regional policy perspective and to enhance the Trans-Atlantic link between Europe (EU), Russia and North America.

Recommendations

The final session of the Symposium was dedicated to reviewing the main ideas that recurred throughout the four thematic sessions. These have been captured in this report. Participants were pleased with the level of participation and felt that the frank and open discussion helped to address the policy gaps that exist among the Northern Dimension policies being undertaken in North America, Europe and Russia. Participants acknowledged that an increased knowledge base on circumpolar issues is necessary and that 'human development' must be the backbone of this framework. Against this background a number of recommendations were made for future consideration Arctic stakeholders.

The *Symposium on Northern Dimension - Expanding Circumpolar Cooperation* having taken place in Brussels on June 3-4, 2004 recommends the following:

- 1) To further the discussion on the creation of an "Arctic Charter" or convention.
- 2) To organize further meetings of the regional bodies operating in the northern region (CBSS, BEAC, AC, NCM) and the EU to discuss reduction of remaining mandate overlap and to discuss better coordination.
- 3) To continue open discussion and dialogue between different stakeholders and interest groups on relevant northern issues on different fora.
- 4) To actively engage the European Union in the sustainable development of the Arctic.
- 5) To develop a set of guidelines for research undertaken in the Arctic.
- 6) To encourage follow-up and outreach to Northerners, especially indigenous peoples, for the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) and the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) are released.
- 7) To distribute the Symposium Report widely for follow-up purposes starting from the Conference of the Parliamentarians in the Arctic region in September 3-5, 2004 in Nuuk, Greenland and the 3rd Open Meeting of the Northern Research Forum in September 15-18, 2004 in Yellowknife, NWT, Canada.

To continue discussion among the Symposium participants.

- 8) Possible need to continue discussion on the regional organizations' need for better coordination, potentially in the form of an umbrella forum
- 9) The Arctic Council should evolve into a proper organization in order to be able to facilitate regional policy perspective and to enhance the Trans-Atlantic link between Europe (EU), Russia and North America