

The shifting focus of Northern cooperation

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This position paper draws upon two experiences of regional cooperation in the Northern hemisphere. The first experience is that of the regional cooperation in the Baltic Sea region (BSR). Although from the Arctic point of view the Baltic Sea region may not be sufficiently “Northern” and perhaps seem to have an altogether different agenda, there are similarities between the BSR and Arctic cooperation that are worth to explore. The second experience is that of the Arctic cooperation that, although less visible in those European countries that are below Finland, Sweden and Norway, has become much more visible in recent years. The aim of this paper is to outline few similarities between the BSR and Arctic cooperation and examine some of the limits to regional cooperation in the Arctic. The organizations that will be analyzed in this paper are the Council of the Baltic States (CBSS) for the Baltic Sea region and the Arctic Council (AC) for the Arctic region.

Similarities between the BSR and Arctic cooperation

An obvious starting point for the discussion on both examples of regional cooperation would be the end of the Cold War. The importance of this profound geopolitical event has been widely acknowledged therefore it would suffice to mention in this context that the end of the Cold War gave rise to cooperation activism in both regional settings. In the context of the BSR the Copenhagen declaration of 1992 that gave birth to the CBSS is considered as an event of foremost importance, while in the Arctic there are several events that are of crucial importance for the Arctic cooperation. First, there was Mikhail Gorbachev’s speech in Murmansk in 1987 which made it possible to for the eight Arctic countries to strive for closer cooperation that resulted in the Rovaniemi meeting in 1991 that gave birth to the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). Even more important, the eight Arctic countries worked in close relation with indigenous peoples’ organizations (IPOs). Third, the Arctic Council was established with the Ottawa Declaration in 1996 “as a high level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.” It is thus possible to divide the evolution of Arctic cooperation into several stages.

Although there are some remarkable similarities between initiation of regional cooperation after the Cold War between the BSR and Arctic region, it should also be taken into account that with regard to cooperation in the BSR the fall of the Iron Curtain meant return to normality and revival of previous cooperation efforts, while in the Arctic cooperation has not been vibrant before the Cold War therefore it had to be built from a scratch. Oran Young names several reasons (in addition to the impact of the Cold War) for that including “the dominance of core/periphery relations, and the influence of an externally-generated and romanticized vision of the Arctic world”.¹ In sum, although the fall of the Iron Curtain was an important event that made it possible for regional cooperation to take off, the cases of the BSR and the Arctic are also somewhat different, not least because in the Arctic IPOs have an important role to play. The number of IPOs acting as permanent participants (PPs) cannot be larger than seven (thus being smaller than the

number of Arctic countries), but otherwise IPOs are full-fledged members of the AC having a possibility to participate in decision-making process, and this is a major distinction from the BSR cooperation.²

Another example of similarity between the BSR and Arctic cooperation is the character of regional organizations in these areas. It has been noted on many occasions that both the CBSS and the AC are mere umbrella organizations in these regions, and there are many other organizations dealing with similar issues. One only needs to take a look at the list of partner organizations of the CBSS and the AC to understand the scope of crossborder regional activism in these areas. With regard to the AC it has been even argued by a Russian researcher Tamara Semenova that the AC has been but one of the many environmental and cooperation organizations that were dealing with Arctic issues and already existed at the time when the AC was created.³ Although the CBSS and the AC are intergovernmental organizations, they are part of a larger setting of cooperation organizations.

When comparing the BSR and Arctic cases it should be noted that at least partly the countries participating in both regional cooperation frameworks are the same because Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway are part both of the Arctic and Baltic regions. It should be emphasized that some of these countries have been quite active both in the BSR and in the Arctic. Apart from the possibility that such country layout can create tensions between the two regional cooperation settings, it has also happened that both the BSR and the Arctic have been affected by the same policies, for example, the Northern Dimension (ND) policy. Initially the ND was intended for a very broad geographic area covering part of the Baltic Sea, the EU-Russia relations and part of the Arctic region, but later its centre of gravity moved Northwards, especially when in 2006 it became a common policy of the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. Although both regions recently have experienced significant activism, the record is mixed. For example, Sweden has placed the BSR on the top of its EU presidency agenda for 2009, while Norway few years ago declared High North as its top foreign policy priority. So, to some degree there is competition between the two regions.

¹ Young, O.R. The Structure of Arctic Cooperation: Solving Problems/Seizing Opportunities. A paper prepared at the request of Finland in preparation for the fourth conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Rovaniemi, 27-29 August 2000, and the Finnish chairmanship of the Arctic Council during the period 2000-2002.

² Tamara Semenova has written that IPOs have even managed to add their perspectives to the widely accepted concept of sustainable development. Semenova, T. "Sustainable Development in the Arctic: Indigenous Visions". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association 48th Annual Convention, Hilton Chicago, CHICAGO, IL, USA.

http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p179158_index.html Last accessed on 28.06.2008.

³ "...the AC was not a monopoly in the substantial field of activity – it has been surrounded by many environmental and cooperation organizations that already existed at the global, regional and national levels. Some of them were able to successfully compete with the AC either by higher level of specialization or by more influential international agencies or by available resources." Semenova, T. "Indigenous Organizations as Participants to the Arctic Council". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii, Mar 05, 2005.

http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p69388_index.html Last accessed on 27.06.2008.

Both the AC and the CBSS are somewhat similar as intergovernmental organizations with limited decision-making authority, limited resources and little regulatory content. It means that the AC and the CBSS do not have large resources of their own to plan and implement expensive large scale projects. Both organizations cannot regulate behavior of their members, and because of the fact that decisions are taken consensually decisionmaking process can only result in the lowest common denominator. Oran Young has argued (with regard to the AC) that these deficiencies can be partly overcome by clever usage of the comparative advantage of the particular organization,⁴ but nevertheless it cannot escape being weak and non-binding form of multilateralism.

Similarities can also be found in the realm of priorities. Military issues have been almost absent in the BSR and Arctic cooperation. Moreover, it was explicitly mentioned in the Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council that issues of military security would be left outside the scope of this organization.⁵ There is also a notable commonality with regard to recent trends in defining priorities for the AC and the CBSS. An agreement was reached within the CBSS in June 2008 that the previous practice of defining annual priorities for this organization should be abolished. Several long-term priorities were defined in order to ensure greater continuity and coherence in the functioning of the CBSS. Currently, there are five priorities: environment; economic development; energy; education and culture; civil security and the human dimension.⁶ The necessity to adopt long-term priorities is also apparent in the AC where the current Norwegian presidency in close cooperation with the upcoming Danish and Swedish presidencies have proposed several long-term priorities for 2006-2012: climate change; integrated management of resources; the International Polar Year 2007-2008 (IPY); indigenous peoples and local living conditions; management issues.⁷ It seems that both organizations have come to a conclusion that it is essential to have long-term priorities instead of limited short term goals.

Are there any lessons to be drawn from similarities between the BSR and the Arctic regions? The abovementioned similarities have been noted in the AC and the CBSS because in both AC's Salekhard declaration (2006) and in CBSS's Riga Declaration (2008) it has been noted that both organizations should follow each others work and keep in close contact. It is clear that there is potential for both regions to learn from each others experience.

⁴ Young, O.R. The Structure of Arctic Cooperation: Solving Problems/Seizing Opportunities. A paper prepared at the request of Finland in preparation for the fourth conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Rovaniemi, 27-29 August 2000, and the Finnish chairmanship of the Arctic Council during the period 2000-2002.

⁵ Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council. Signed by the representatives of the Arctic States in Ottawa on the 19th of September, 1996.

<http://arcticcouncil.org/filearchive/Declaration%20on%20the%20Establishment%20of%20the%20Arctic%20Council-1..pdf> Last accessed on 27.06.2008.

⁶ Declaration on the reform of the Council of the Baltic Sea States CBSS Ministers' Deputies Meeting Riga, 3 June 2008.

http://www.cbss.org/summits/riga2008/chairmansconclusions/declarationonthereformofthebss_riga3june2008.pdf Last accessed on 26.06.2008.

⁷ Common objectives and priorities for the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish chairmanships of the Arctic Council (2006-2012). http://arctic-council.org/article/2007/11/common_priorities Last accessed on 29.06.2008.

A way forward for the BSR and Arctic cooperation?

The last 15 years have witnessed quite successful Baltic Sea and Arctic cooperation, but that doesn't mean that the future is bright. What would be the main obstacles to further successful regional cooperation? In the attempt to answer this question lies the principal distinction between the two regions. Although the BSR is challenged by the problem of deteriorating state of the Baltic Sea, there are few serious problems apart from that that have to be addressed. Of course, soft security, competitiveness and energy issues are high on the agenda, and the BSR has been recognized as having its own special needs that should be addressed through designing a separate strategy for this region (the European Commission has been assigned for this task), but apart from that there is little potential for tensions on a regional scale.

The case of the Arctic cooperation and the AC in particular is different. Lassi Heininen has argued that geopolitics may have a serious impact on Arctic cooperation and that the effect of exclusion of hard security and military issues from regional cooperation is yet to be seen.⁸ Tamara Semenova has written that “the mission of the AC is promoting sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic region”.⁹ The AC and other organizations with a particular interest in Arctic regions have been very successful in promoting interest in Arctic issues, helping the IPOs to be heard and in accumulating knowledge about linkages between Arctic climate and global weather changes. One only needs to take a quick overview of the AC's working groups to understand to what extent Arctic cooperation is driven by environmental concerns (see information box on AC's working groups). And this is hardly surprising because, as Marcus Haward and Julia Jabour describe it, Arctic cooperation started with Mikhail Gorbachev's explicit support for Arctic research council and later didn't go far beyond environmental issues and concerns for the well-being of local communities.¹⁰

⁸ Heininen, L. Circumpolar International Relations and Geopolitics. Arctic Human Development Report, 2004.

⁹ Semenova, T. “Indigenous Organizations as Participants to the Arctic Council”. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Hilton Hawaiian Village, Honolulu, Hawaii, Mar 05, 2005. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p69388_index.html Last accessed on 27.06.2008.

¹⁰ Haward, M., Jabour, J. Science and Politics in the Polar Regions. Paper presented at International Studies Association Conference, Chicago 28 February – 3 March 2007.

Arctic Council's working groups

The Arctic Contaminants Action Program. “The goal of ACAP continues to be to reduce emissions of pollutants into the environment in order to reduce the identified pollution risks.”

http://arctic-council.org/working_group/acap

Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme Working Group. “AMAP's current objective is “providing reliable and sufficient information on the status of, and threats to, the Arctic environment, and providing scientific advice on actions to be taken in order to support Arctic governments in their efforts to take remedial and preventive actions relating to contaminants”.”

http://arctic-council.org/working_group/amap

Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna. “CAFF's mandate is to address the conservation of Arctic biodiversity, and communicate the findings to the governments and residents of the Arctic, helping to promote practices which ensure sustainability of the Arctic's living resources.”

http://arctic-council.org/working_group/caff

Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group. “The mandate of the EPPR Working Group is to deal with the prevention, preparedness and response to environmental emergencies in the Arctic.” http://arctic-council.org/working_group/eppr

Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment Working Group. “PAME's Working Group activities are directed towards protection of the Arctic marine environment.” http://arctic-council.org/working_group/pame

The Working Group on Sustainable Development. “The objective of the SDWG is to protect and enhance the economies, culture and health of the inhabitants of the Arctic, in an environmentally sustainable manner.” http://arctic-council.org/working_group/sdwg

Issues of soft security and environmental protection may dominate in the absence of stronger security concerns, but when such concerns arise, they are bound to take upper hand. There are signs that this is already happening. Norway (the current chairman of the AC) has outlined its priorities for 2006-2008, and it is clear that the issue of Arctic resources is high on the agenda.¹¹ The expected impact of the global warming process is going to open new possibilities for mining and extraction of oil and gas.¹² Areas that were almost inaccessible before are probably going to be accessible in future, and this involves necessity to improve joint management of Arctic resources. Integrated resource management is something that should be taken into common practice by all Arctic countries. However, the issue of resource management is much more complex than ordinary extraction of resources in the most environmentally friendly manner because some of the Arctic areas are still disputed. Sovereignty issues are still high on the agenda. This may have three effects. First, it may delay extraction of resources. Second, it may generate conflicts among the Arctic countries. Third, it may alienate indigenous people as many of them see intensified economic activity in the Arctic regions as detrimental to their traditional lifestyles and local vulnerable ecosystems.

¹¹ Programme of the Norwegian chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2006-2008. http://arctic-council.org/article/2007/11/norwegian_programme Last accessed on 27.06.2008.

¹² Arctic Oil and Gas 2007. Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, Oslo 2007.

What influence the joint effect of global warming and increased importance of natural resources is going to have on Arctic cooperation? Most likely, this trend is going to have dual effect on Arctic cooperation because it does two things at the same time. First, it pulls countries together because effects of global warming require coordinated response and activities aimed at mitigating global warming and its consequences. Thus, it is likely that regional cooperation would be strengthened. As a consequence, the scope of cooperation can become broader. New working groups can be created and new projects can be implemented. Second, it pulls countries apart because improved opportunities for accessing natural resources in Arctic areas create considerable conflict potential. There are different views on the possibility of considerable deterioration of relations among the Arctic countries. For example, there have been some positive signs recently with regard to the Norwegian-Russian maritime border, but it is likely that there will not be an easy settlement over disputed border areas that are known to hold substantial oil and gas reserves. It is still to be seen whether these conflicts will significantly affect the functioning of the AC and lead to changes in the structure of the Arctic cooperation, but it is very unlikely that a separate Arctic regime would emerge in a foreseeable future. What seems possible is increased convergence in views about management of the Arctic environment. It is also likely that indigenous views and knowledge are still going to be highly valued. However, the issues of high politics will be dealt separately, frequently - on a bilateral basis. This would prevent countries from establishing cordial relationships, but at the same time current regional cooperation framework is likely be preserved.