

Final exam

Part A: Identify and explain the driving forces of circumpolar cooperation. Discuss the role of the Arctic Council in this cooperation.

Introduction

In the recent decades, the Circumpolar North has become the centre of attention for a variety of global entities spanning from Arctic to non-Arctic countries, indigenous organizations, environmental NGO's and multinational companies. Climate change and receding ice are creating new possibilities in the region but also new major challenges that require cooperation between stakeholders if they shall be dealt with successfully. The big focus on the Arctic is evident by the fact that an unprecedented number of states are creating their own Arctic high-level policies and strategies (Heininen & Forrest, undated:11). The term 'The Arctic Boom' describes the rise in multiple political interests the world has gotten in the Arctic (Heininen, undated:195). These concern the region's rich natural resources, the effects of climate change, policies on pollution, radioactivity and nuclear safety issues, the northern sea routes as well as the preservation of natural and socio-cultural diversity on Earth (ibid.). Many of the issues are pan-Arctic if not global by nature and combined they create potential for conflicts, which is why international and circumpolar cooperation is proving ever more important. Since the end of the Cold War, a large number of initiatives for cooperation have been made. Many of them have as the main goal to unify the previously divided blocs and create political stability. Today, a variety of forces drive cooperation in the Circumpolar North on multiple intergovernmental, regional, indigenous, academic and civic levels. Unlike during the Cold War, the arctic region is no longer seen only as a military security region and cooperation now exists on a range of 'soft' issues (Heininen, undated:200).

This paper identifies and describes some of the main driving forces behind circumpolar cooperation and the historical context in which they have emerged. After this, it describes the structure, work and role of the Arctic Council followed by a discussion of the current challenges it faces.

Historical overview on circumpolar cooperation

Historically, there has been much cooperation within the Circumpolar North as well as with the outside world. For example, trade routes have existed for thousands of years connecting the North to the South (Heininen 2004:207). This historical overview will not go into details with pre-modern circumpolar cooperation but instead take its point of departure with World War Two. During the war, the rising geopolitical importance of the Arctic woke the world's interest and subsequently led to increased

military activity in the region (Heininen 2004:207). This trend continued and multiplied with the coming of the Cold War, which lasted from 1945-1991. During the Cold War, the nuclear build-up and arms race transformed the Arctic into a 'military theater' and the region became politically frozen and divided between the two blocs of NATO and the Warsaw Pact (Heininen 2010: 218). Few international or region-wide actors were present in the Circumpolar North in the period (Heininen, undated:197). However, some cooperation did take place (Heininen & Forrest:3). The International Convention on the Regulation of Whaling (1946), The Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears (1973) and the North Calotte Committee's work on promoting trade and tourism within the Nordic cooperation are all results of intergovernmental circumpolar cooperation that were achieved during the Cold War (Heininen 2004:208). On a civic level, the International Geophysical Year in 1957/58 brought scientist together, and the North Calotte Peace Days held between 1964 and 1996 sought to promote disarmament and peace between the peoples of Finland, Sweden, Russia and Norway (ibid.). Despite these examples, the Cold War period was characterized by high political tension and limited pan-Arctic cooperation.

This started to change in the 1980's. Towards the end of the Cold War, former Soviet Union leader Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a reformation process in Russia and in 1987 he gave an important speech to the world known as 'the Murmansk speech'. In this he announced several proposals for peaceful international cooperation and arms control in the Circumpolar North, which signaled the start of a new era (Heininen, undated:199). For this reason, Gorbachev can be seen as one of the important driving forces of modern circumpolar cooperation. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not affect the trend of increased collaboration negatively, on the contrary, as both the blocs had mutual interest in closing the divide after the Cold War.

Post-Cold War cooperation

In the wake of the Cold War, a "*rebirth of circumpolar connections*" took place between the two blocs (Heininen 2004:208). The new political climate gave rise to international, regional and non-governmental cooperation on many 'soft' issues. Military focus began to decrease and competition for natural resources started to increase, which is still the trend today anno 2016 (Heininen, undated:200). The Circumpolar North quickly started to develop beyond a security region into a 'multiple use region' (Heininen, undated:200). One initiative was the establishment of Council of Baltic Sea States in 1992, which was meant to create integration between the two rival blocs and to promote peace, and several other initiatives followed (Heininen, undated:201).

Regional cooperation: Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR)

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) is an example of regional cooperation initiated in 1992 by former Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Torvald Stoltenberg. The organization consists of 13 sparsely populated administrative regions from the northern parts of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia placed by the Barents Sea (Lukina, undated:5). BEAR has an intergovernmental level and an inter-regional level with each having their own council and working groups. The principles of cooperation were stated in the Kirkenes Declaration (Lukina, undated:4). The political top-down initiative intended to promote collaboration on especially nuclear safety, since the region had and still has one of the highest concentrations of nuclear weapons, waste, power plants and submarines in the world (Lukina, undated:12). The declaration also mentions sustainable development, environmental protection, regional infrastructure, tourism, cultural contacts and indigenous issues as its focus areas (Lukina, undated:4+10-12). The shared challenges of the Barents Sea regions like high unemployment and depopulation is thought to be handled best through e.g. trade cooperation with new major partners and investors across borders (Lukina:3-4). After the Cold War, collaboration initiatives often had the two-sided goal of securing political stability and protecting the environment, which were also the case the BEAR (Heininen 2004:212). This is probably why BEAR does not cooperate on sensitive issues such as fishery policy, oil/gas extraction policy and military and security issues, which would increase the potential for conflict and disrupt confidence-building measures between the two former rival blocs (Lukina:11; Heininen, undated:205).

Indigenous cooperation

As mentioned in the introduction, the driving forces of cooperation in the Arctic do not only work on an intergovernmental level. BEAR is an example of regional cooperation, which is still located within a formal state-political context. Cooperation between other kinds of actors is exemplified by that between indigenous organizations of the Circumpolar North. They have naturally had mutual interest in seeking together since they share interests in similar things like increased autonomy and securing cultural and economic rights (Heininen, undated:207). Thus, there is a rising tendency that indigenous peoples collaborate more on both international, circumpolar, inter-regional and regional levels throughout the world (Heininen, undated:208). Indigenous organizations, like the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), work on a global level. Others work at the circumpolar level, like the Arctic Council and the Inuit Circumpolar Conference (ICC). On an inter-regional (but also international) level there is the Sámi Council in the Scandinavian North (Heininen, undated:207). Working on a regional (Russian) level there is Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON). Many indigenous organizations are active on different cooperation

levels at the same time, and it can therefore be hard to classify which one they belong the most to. Many of the organizations existed even before the collapse of the Soviet Union. All indigenous organizations fight for improving the life and situation of the people they represent, to influence economic development and to protect the environment they live in.

Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS)

The Finnish government initiated the ‘Rovaniemi process’ in 1989 in the wake of Gorbachev’s Murmansk speech with the goal to protect the Arctic environment (Heininen, undated:202). Concerns about long-range air and water pollution were some of the main driving forces behind the The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), which was the result of the Rovaniemi process. It was signed in June 1991 (Heininen 2004:212). The eight Arctic countries and three indigenous organizations were involved in its creation, and the declaration made environmental issues part of the Arctic states’ foreign policy agenda for the first time (Heininen & Forrest, undated:3). In the years after it was signed, the areas of cooperation broadened considerably (Heininen 2004:213). This development led to the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996, which replaced the AEPS.

The Northern Forum and the European Union’s Northern Dimension

Many more types of forces have been driving circumpolar cooperation around the northern hemisphere in recent decades. The Northern Forum, officially founded in 1990, was established as a platform for Northern regional leaders to share knowledge and experience and to promote cooperation between regions (Heininen, undated:210). Also worth mentioning is European Union’s Northern Dimension, which has the Baltic Sea/North West Russia region, the European-Russian relationship, nuclear safety and securing political stability, among other things as its focus (Heininen, undated:205). I will not describe these two initiatives in depth due to the limits of this paper, but instead go on to discuss the role of the Arctic Council today.

The structure and role of the Arctic Council

The Arctic Council (also abbreviated ‘the Council’ from now on) is a high-level intergovernmental forum for international circumpolar matters and was established in 1996 (Heininen 2004:212). The recently published Arctic Human Development Report from 2014 states that “*The most important and inclusive pan-Arctic body is the Arctic Council*”. (Poelzer & Wilson 2014:210). The Council currently consists of eight member states (‘the Arctic Eight’), six indigenous organizations as permanent participants and more than 30 observers (many of which are non-Arctic). The observer

group include states (e.g. France and Germany) international organizations (e.g. Nordic Council of Ministers and North Atlantic Marine Commission), and NGO's (e.g. Circumpolar Conservation Union and Association of World Reindeer Herders), but their influence is strictly limited (Heininen 2004:214). The official job of the Council is to promote cooperation on activities that require circumpolar collaboration and while doing so to "(...) *ensure the full consultation with and the involvement of indigenous people and their communities*" (Ottawa 1996:1). It is rather remarkable for an international, intergovernmental high-level forum to include the voices of indigenous peoples in the way the Arctic Council does (Poelzer & Wilson 2014:210). Some of the main goals of the Arctic Council are related to 'soft issues' such as the promotion of environmental protection, civility, sustainability and human development (Heininen & Forrest, undated:14). Questions on infrastructure, transportation, communication and telemedicine are also on its agenda. The Council does not deal with sensitive issues related to military security and avoids questions on large-scale resource exploitation and environmental issues related to military issues (Heininen, undated:202; Heininen 2004:215). Thus, it can be said to be a high-level forum with a low profile (Heininen, undated:203). There are six working groups under the Arctic Council: Arctic Contaminants Action Program, The Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna, Emergency Prevention Preparedness and Response, Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment and finally the Sustainable Development Working Group. The Arctic Council does not have any formal legal or legislative power and can therefore not make legally binding decisions (Poelzer & Wilson 2014:210). Basically, it is a board that provides governments with valuable advice (Heininen 2010:279). Therefore, it is regarded as a 'soft-law' instrument (Heininen & Forrest, undated:14).

Successes, challenges and future of the Arctic Council

This year of 2016, the Arctic Council is celebrating its 20 anniversary. It is therefore natural to discuss the achievements of the Council in the first two decades as well as its role in circumpolar cooperation. It is fair to say that the work of the Council has been of major importance for the peaceful human and political development in the region. Ignoring the exclusion of military and energy issues on its agenda, the Arctic Council has been successful in raising issues of pressing concern for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of the Arctic. It is especially remarkable how indigenous peoples' organisations have been given equal access to a forum for "*high-level international diplomatic conversations*" with the other eight Arctic states (Poelzer & Wilson 2014:210+212). The role of the Arctic Council as an advisory board without formal legal decision-making powers has proven not to limit the Council's work. Recently, Arctic Council facilitated the

negotiation process leading to the legal-binding agreement on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic from 2011, signed by all of the Arctic states (Poelzer & Wilson 2014:213). One could say that the Arctic Council is starting to ‘punch above its weight’. By this I mean that the Arctic Council has shown to be capable of being more than just an expert board, but instead a strongly influential governance body (Poelzer & Wilson:213).

Despite that Lassi Heininen and Scot Forrest from University of Lapland say that “*the impact of the Arctic Council (...) cannot be underestimated*”, the future of the Council promises several challenges (Heininen & Forrest, undated:19). Many critical questions have been raised concerning the Council’s effectiveness and capability to solve a range of issues. The lack of power to make legally binding agreements makes the Council unable to sufficiently deal with things like climate change, some argue (Heininen & Forrest, undated:15). Many scientists are advocating for binding treaties in the circumpolar region to secure regulation, like seen in Antarctica (ibid.). Critics also point to the fact that the Council has inherent institutional weaknesses, like lack of sub-regional representation. This undermines the idea of the Arctic Council as being a true ‘voice of the Arctic’ (Heininen, undated:203). The increasing number of non-Arctic observers in the Council is also a source of worry to some. The fear is that indigenous organizations risk losing political influence in the future, even though it is a shared understanding in the Council that observers have a strictly limited role (Poelzer & Wilson 2014:212-213). Some even say that the indigenous organizations already aren’t able “*to fulfill their roles as active members of the Council*” (ibid.). Lastly, the exclusion of sensitive issues on the Council’s agenda related military and large-scale resource utilization might cause the arctic states to seek bilateral agreements on such issues instead of pan-Arctic agreements, which can make the role of the Council and circumpolar cooperation in general loose importance (Heininen 2010:281).

Conclusion

The driving forces of circumpolar collaboration have been shown to be many and this paper has described the historical context in which they have emerged. The Cold War was a period of limited institutional circumpolar cooperation, but this changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, where cooperation initiatives started to bloom on many levels and between actors of all kinds. Circumpolar cooperation is still flourishing even though Russia’s annexation of Crimea has raised concern on the potential of a rebirth of the Cold War and new political tension in the Arctic. However, there is luckily no indication of such a development so far. The region is still characterized by peace and stability and the Arctic Council has become a valuable intergovernmental and indigenous forum for

discussing pan-Arctic matters. Despite challenges for the Council, its accomplishments so far predict a hopeful future for continued circumpolar cooperation.

References

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