

PEACE AND SECURITY

RUSSIA'S ARCTIC COUNCIL CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2021-2023

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Russia is preparing for its second Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2021-2023. Significant global changes have occurred that influenced international cooperation in the Arctic since their first Chairmanship 15 years ago.



The existing political and strategic rivalry between two main Arctic powers, namely Russia and the United States, affects economic, environmental and rescue cooperation in the region.



It's been repeatedly emphasized that Russia's plans to promote continued cooperation and peaceful coexistence in the Arctic. Russia intends to strengthen the socio-economic agenda in the Arctic, despite Moscow's efforts to project power there in recent years.

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RUSSIA'S UPCOMING ARCTIC COUNCIL CHAIRMANSHIP IN 2021-2023

Nurlan Aliyev

Russia is currently preparing for its second term serving as chair of the Arctic Council. The country will officially take on the roll in May of 2021 and lead the Council until 2023. Russia's first Chairmanship was realized in 2004-2006. Following that period, significant global changes occurred, both when it came to climate issues and in relations between Russia and the West. Those, in turn, exerted influence on international cooperation in the Arctic. Though the Arctic Council does not deal with strategic issues, the existing political and strategic rivalry between two main Arctic powers, namely Russia and the United States, affects economic, environmental, and emergency cooperation in the region. In this respect, this research aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities that will be involved in Russia's upcoming Chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

RUSSIA'S FIRST CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL

The Arctic Council was formally established in 1996. The body is the leading inter-governmental forum promoting cooperation and coordination between the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous peoples, and other Arctic inhabitants. The Council's work focuses on shared Arctic issues, in particular, on those of sustainable development and environmental protection in the region. The Chairmanship of the Council rotates among the Arctic States every two years.¹

During Russia's first Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2004-2006 it had a number of priorities, including the realization of the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Action Plan (SDAP), which was to include the development of the Northern Sea Route and the implementation of further coordinated measures to protect, preserve, and restore the Arctic environment. Russia also wished to focus on enhancing environmental security, including the prevention of ecological emergencies, as well as to address Arctic resource management in order to ensure the environ-

mental, social, and economic welfare of current and future generations in the region. Plus, in light of the development of oil and gas resources in the region, issues relating to the preservation and restoration of natural biological diversity were to be given significant consideration. That would involve the protection of biological species and their habitats and preservation of natural heritage objects. All of this was outlined in "Russia's Program of the Russian Federation Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2004-2006" along with issues such as cooperation in the field of prevention and management of emergencies and sustainable development of the Arctic indigenous peoples². It should be noted that the first Russian Chairmanship happened in what might now be considered the heyday of relations between Russia and the West, if compared with the way they stand now. Still, it seems the upcoming Chairmanship's goals, at least officially, will not significantly differ from the previous ones, though it will come during a time when ties between Russia and the West continue to deteriorate.

GOALS AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES OF RUSSIA'S UPCOMING CHAIRMANSHIP

Statements from officials have repeatedly emphasized Russia's plans to promote continued cooperation and peaceful coexistence in the Arctic. According to Alexander Krutikov, a former first deputy minister of the Russian Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic, Russia intends to set their sights on a socio-economic agenda and promote interaction in the field of healthcare. "We hope that we will succeed in strengthening the socio-economic agenda of the Arctic Council under the Chairmanship," said Krutikov. He also noted the importance of improving the quality of life of indigenous

¹ The Arctic Council. 2021. "About the Arctic Council", <https://arctic-council.org/en/about/>.

² Program of the Russian Federation Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2004-2006. Ministerial Meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland. November 24, 2004. November, 2004, <https://oarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/1766>. See also: Programma predsedatel'stva Rossiyskoy Federatsii V Arkticheskoy Sovete v 2004-2006 godakh. December, 7, 2004, https://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/rso/-/asset_publisher/0vP3hQoCPRg5/content/id/453630.

peoples. According to Nikolai Korchunov, Russia's Ambassador-at-Large for the Arctic, preserving the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples will also be given particular attention.³

Moscow's main declared plans are to tackle the environmental, social, and economic problems of the Arctic. The Kommersant news outlet reported on certain details of the program for the Chairmanship, revealed by Ambassador Korchunov at a recent forum, but it was also stated that the program had not yet been completed. As part of the environmental agenda, Russia will put together proposals to eliminate the consequences of environmental emergencies, reduce harmful emissions, and facilitate acceptance and raise awareness of climate change.⁴ Indeed, problems related to climate change have become of great concern to Moscow in recent years. Russia is worried about the rise in temperatures in the Arctic, caused by global warming, as the melting of permafrost has already started to affect the infrastructure of the Russian Arctic zone. As part of one of the Russian Chairmanship initiatives, Russia plans to build the first international scientific station in the Arctic, together with the other Arctic States, in order to study climate change.⁵

As mentioned earlier, part of Russia's social agenda will focus on working to improve the quality of the indigenous peoples of the Far North lives. Increased access to healthcare, including through telemedicine, joint education projects, and efforts to preserve the region's cultural heritage are all to fall within that scope.

As for the economy, according to Nikolai Korchunov, Russia wants the Arctic to become «a really attractive region for investors.» The creation of The International Fund for the Development of the Arctic, announced by Alexander Krutikov, will contribute to that becoming a reality. It's hoped the program would be used to support joint projects in a number of fields, such as infrastructure. But it is not yet clear what organizations or states would be involved, or to what extent this fund will be financed.⁶ In an interview with the Kommersant, Nikolai Korchunov noted that there is a need to work out a system of financial support

for the sustainable development of the region. In this vein, Russia has proposed the creation of a Fund for Sustainable Development of the Arctic, which would assist in the implementation of the aims and objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change and help assist in setting out sustainable development goals, as well as the coordination of national strategies for the development of the northern territories. "Based on this logic, we've submitted a proposal for consideration on a sustainable Arctic finance project to the Arctic Council's Working Group on Sustainable Development," Korchunov said.⁷ It is more than likely that Moscow's main goal in this is to create an investment source for projects in its Arctic zone.

During its upcoming Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, Russia intends to increase the development of interregional cross-border cooperation. Alexander Krutikov has said Russia intends to stimulate mutual trade in both goods and services. "We are already working on the corresponding program, by May, by the time we take over the Chairmanship, it will be ready," he said. Another Russian priority in the economic sphere will be the development of the Northern Sea Route, which, according to Krutikov, has "great prospects of becoming an environmentally safe corridor."⁸ Krutikov stressed that while Russia is chair, Moscow plans to suggest a new program for promoting cross-border cooperation and interregional links to the Council's regions and member states, including with respect to the indigenous peoples. The program will aim to promote the launch of joint projects between the Arctic regions. Krutikov added that stimulating Russian exports is part of the country's official Arctic Zone development strategy.⁹

Recently appointed minister for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic Alexey Chekunkov, has confirmed that his ministry, together with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is preparing an action plan for Russia's Chairmanship. According to him, there are three main subject matters to be addressed. The first is the quality of life of indigenous groups and other people living in the Arctic Zone and that of those "who are creating a new Arctic economy." The second is economic development, Chekunkov says the region is rife with opportunity, "the Arctic is a territory of economic breakthrough, major

3 TASS.2020."RF v ramkakh predsedatel'stva v Arkticheskom sovete usilit sotsial'no-ekonomicheskuyu povestku", November 25, <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/10095025>.

4 Chernenko, Yelena.2020."Teoriya i Arktika mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy - Rossiya gotovitsya vozglavit' Arkticheskiy sovet", Gazeta „Kommersant“ №217 ot 26.11.2020, str. 6, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4585691>.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Nikolay Korchunov.2021. «V Arktike net problem, trebuyushchikh voyennogo resheniya», Yelena Chernenko, Gazeta „Kommersant“ №5 ot 15.01.2021, str. 5Jan, 14, 2021, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4641929>.

8 Ibid.

9 Arctic.ru.2020."Russia to offer Arctic Council countries its own cross-border cooperation program", October 1, 2020, <https://arctic.ru/international/20201001/982732.html>.

projects are being implemented there, not only in the development of hydrocarbon raw materials, but also in the field of technological developments, the creation of new processing industries, the development of fishing, logistics, and the Northern Sea Route." The third subject is the climate agenda. "We will develop plans on these three topics and share them with our international partners during Russia's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council," said the minister.¹⁰

Nikolai Korchunov, Russia's the Ambassador at Large for the Arctic Cooperation, has stated, "The need to improve the living conditions of the population of the Arctic region, the adaptation of life in high latitudes to climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, as well as the economic development of the Arctic, accompanied by large-scale projects for the extraction and processing of natural resources, the intensification of cargo transportation along the Northern Sea Route, the growth of tourism and trade - all of that requires the collective effort of the Arctic eight." And that is why, the Ambassador says, these topics will be placed front and center during the Russian Chairmanship. Korchunov also stressed that Moscow hopes that the Agreement on the Prevention of Unregulated Fishing on the High Seas in the Central Arctic Ocean will soon come into full force. One problem the agreement, which the Ambassador called an important element of marine resource management, is facing is it has yet to be ratified by China.¹¹ Regarding new treaties, Korchunov argues that the current legal framework in place is enough to regulate the region and no further universal treaties on the Arctic are needed at this time. However, specific agreements may be necessary to formalize interactions on issues such as environmental protection, transport development, telecommunications, scientific activities, financing of infrastructural and socio-economic development, and coordinated responses to potential emergencies. Korchunov says Russia will welcome the development and adoption of new agreements and arrangements if they fall in line with the interests of the Arctic States.¹²

As part of its environmental agenda, Russia will propose many projects to eliminate the consequences of environmental emergencies. New initiatives are already being discussed and funding will be applied for under the Arctic Council Project Support Instrument (PSI). The compilation of environmental maps

of forest fires in the Arctic Zone, a database on Arctic shipping, the second phase of a project on assessing black carbon emissions and the health of locals, and an assessment of the use of organic pollutants and mercury in the Murmansk region are all examples of projects that have been initiated by Russia.¹³ In the run up to their Chairmanship, Russia submitted project proposals to the Council on biosafety (including COVID-19 issues), sustainable shipping, green financing, and other ideas designed to contribute to the sustainable development of the region. "All these projects are designed to last for over a year and will continue after our Chairmanship," said Ambassador Korchunov.¹⁴ Other areas of focus will be the problem of thawing permafrost, adaptation to climate change, and monitoring such issues. "As part of Russia's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, we plan to hold a forum on building resilience to climate change," said Korchunov. According to him, the push by the head of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) to hold a high-level meeting on permafrost could be realized.¹⁵

Russia also aims to develop international cooperation and financing for the monitoring and neutralization of hazardous objects in the Arctic. The Russian Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic has developed a draft Presidential decree titled «On the Rehabilitation of the Russian Federation Arctic Zone of Flooded and Sunken Facilities with Spent Nuclear Fuel and Radioactive Waste» which implies the approval of such a plan.¹⁶ Of course, bringing the endeavor to fruition will require significant financing, which could be provided by Arctic Council member states.

On December 30, 2020, the makeup of the organizing committee for the preparation and support of Russia's Arctic Council Chairmanship in 2021-2023 was approved by the Russian government. Namely, it was Yuri Tutnev, the Deputy Prime Minister and Presidential Envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District, who approved the composition of the committee. It includes representatives from the Presidential administration and relevant ministries and departments, as well as heads of divisions of large corporations and organizations in the Arctic.¹⁷ An adviser to President Vladimir Putin, Anton Kobayakov, was named Deputy

10 Chekunkov, Alexey. 2021. "Ministr po razvitiyu Dal'nego Vostoka i Arktiki: led budet prolomlen", interviewed by Aleksandra Buder. January 21, <https://tass.ru/interviews/10512039>.

11 Nikolay Korchunov. 2021. «V Arktike net problem, trebuiushchikh voyennogo resheniya», Yelena Chernenko, Gazeta „Kommersant“ №5 ot 15.01.2021, str. 5Jan, 14, 2021, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4641929>.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Projekt Ukaza Prezidenta RF „O reabilitatsii Arkticheskoy zony Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot zatoplennykh i zatonuvshikh ob'yektov s otrabotannym yadernym toplivom i radioaktivnymi otkhodami" (po sostoyaniyu na 05.05.2020) (podgotovlen Minvostokrazvitiya Rossii, ID proyekta 01/03/05-20/00101671), <http://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc;base=PNPA;n=57580#016424279956401144>,

17 Government.ru. 2020. "Utverzhdon sostav orgkomiteta po podgotovke i obespecheniyu predsedatel'stva Rossii v Arkticheskom sovete", December 30, <http://government.ru/news/41261/>.

Chairman and Executive Secretary of the Organizing Committee and he noted that, at present, the industrial development of the Arctic shelf and Arctic shipping is increasingly attracting international attention and room for scientific research is expanding exponentially. "Plus, the global problem of climate change can radically change the situation. All these challenges will be considered during Russia's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council," Kobayakov said.¹⁸

COOPERATION DESPITE MILITARIZATION?

Russian officials continue to reaffirm Moscow's intentions to maintain a cooperative agenda in the Arctic. In fact, maintaining cooperation rather than militarization and confrontation with other Arctic States supports Russia's economic interests in the region. Still, Moscow's current security concerns regarding the Arctic prevail. Russia's stance is best reflected in statements from the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov. In his words, Moscow considers the Arctic to be an area for cooperation, but at the same time Russia stands ready to respond if anyone "questions Russia's ability to defend its interests, including security ones, in the region".¹⁹ Ryabkov believes that the Arctic Council offers all the possibilities for keeping the Arctic an area of cooperation rather than competition. He has also brought up the fact that the Council at one time was a platform for dialogue between military representatives of the member states and said, «Russia will contribute to the resumption of this practice».²⁰

The idea is to resume annual meetings of the Chiefs of General Staff of the Arctic States and this proposition is also supported by other Russian officials. Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, has called for resuming military and political dialogue between the Arctic States in the past and suggested holding talks at the level of military experts. According to him, annual meetings of the Chiefs of General Staff would become an effective mechanism for maintaining regional security. Lavrov lamented the amount of time that has passed since such meetings took place, «Unfortunately, since 2014 these meetings have been suspended. For the purposes of resuming joint work we suggest as a first step to establish contact at the level of military experts of Arctic States.»²¹

It should be noted that since 2014, Russia and the United States have repeatedly accused each other of militarizing the Arctic. However, Russia's power projection prevails over any other military activities in the Arctic.²²

Another official, the first Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Yuri Averyanov, has pointed out that cooperation within the Arctic Council has certain limitations, in part because military-political issues are not discussed there today. He agrees that a practice of yearly meetings between Arctic State military officials would be an effective mechanism for building confidence and security in the Arctic and it should be resumed.²³

Russia's Ambassador Nikolay Korchunov, has reiterated the call to restart such meetings. According to him, Russia is interested in preventing the degradation of the military-political situation in the Arctic and the meetings would aid in that. He echoed others in saying the practice would build confidence and security in the region. And Korchunov has a suggestion on how to take the first step towards restoring the format, "It would be possible to consider the possibility of organizing a dialogue at the level of military experts of the Arctic Council member states where issues such as establishing operational cooperation to prevent incidents in waters outside the territorial seas, joint search and rescue operations at sea, elimination of the consequences of natural disasters and man-made accidents, the creation of direct communication lines with the commands of the armed forces of the Arctic States to prevent dangerous military activities, and the participation of observers in operational and combat training could be discussed."²⁴

Continuing calls by Russian officials to resume the meetings of Chiefs of General Staff of the Arctic States and dialogue between military experts could be explained by Moscow's understanding of the need to maintain open channels of communication with NATO member states in the increasingly militarized region. On the other hand, Moscow might want to at-

18 Ibid.

19 RIA Novosti.2020. "MID vystupil za mirnyy dialog po Arktike", June 9, 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200609/1572713554.html>.

20 Ibid.

21 TASS.2019. "Russia urges contacts at level of Arctic states' military experts", April 9, <https://tass.com/politics/1052764>.

22 Sliwa, Zdzislaw and Aliyev, Nurlan.2020. "Strategic Competition or Possibilities for Cooperation between the United States and Russia in the Arctic", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 33:2, 214-236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2020.1763132>; See also: Aliyev, Nurlan.2019."Russia's military capabilities in the Arctic", *Diplomaatia*, 190/191 June, <https://icds.ee/russias-military-capabilities-in-the-arctic/>.

23 Aver'yanov, Yuriy .2019. „Kogo sogreyet Arktika -Sovbez Rossii predlagayet vozobnovit' voyennyi kanal svyazi mezhdu priarkticheskimi stranami" Ivan Yegorov, *Rossiyskaya gazeta - Federal'nyy vypusk* № 218(7976), <https://rg.ru/2019/09/29/sovbez-predlagaet-vozobnovit-voennyi-kanal-svyazi-mezhdu-priarkticheskimi-stranami.html>.

24 Nikolay Korchunov.2021. «V Arktike net problem, trebuyushchikh voyennogo resheniya», Yelena Chernenko, *Gazeta „Kommersant”* №5 ot 15.01.2021, str. 5, Jan, 14, 2021, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4641929>.

tempt to soften Western state's position on the military intervention in Ukraine and little by little return to the state of relations pre Crimea. In this respect, the resumption of the Arctic Chiefs of Defense Forum may be another platform of dialogue which would also show acceptance of Moscow's realities by Western states.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE EU PERMANENT OBSERVER STATUS, EXPANDING THE RIGHTS OF OBSERVERS AND ACCEPTANCE OF NEW MEMBERS

The European Union considers permanent observer status at the Arctic Council to be legitimization for its Arctic involvement and uses the status at the important intergovernmental platform for discussion of Arctic related problems. Although the EU only obtained "observer-in-principle" status (meaning although there has been no final decision, the EU has in practice the same rights as any other observer) at the Kiruna Ministerial Meeting, for the EU the desire to become a formal observer is "gaining importance and urgency as it is believed that such a status will provide it with the desired legitimacy as an Arctic actor with a voice clear enough to be heard and influence the discussions over the future of the region."²⁵ In recent years, the only states to challenge the confirmation of the EU's observer status were Russia and Canada. And although Canada and the EU have now resolved their tensions regarding an import ban on Canadian seal products and Canada formally lifted its veto at the ministerial meeting in Iqaluit in April 2015, Russia's geostrategic interests led Moscow to continue to block the process.²⁶ Russia-EU relations have steadily deteriorated since September of 2014 when Brussels targeted Russia with sanctions, over its intervention in Ukraine, that could impede its Arctic activities.²⁷ However, Russia's veto is not solely related to tensions with the West after 2014. Even before then, Russia was reluctant to formalize the EU's observer status in the Arctic Council. According to Kristine Offerdal, from the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies, it was Russia rather than Canada that

is the most uncomfortable letting the EU get closer to the Arctic in 2008-2011. "Russia has been instrumental in the Arctic Council decision to develop criteria for permanent observers and hence to postpone the decision with regard to the status of the EU."²⁸

Russia's second Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2021-2023 may provide an impetus for developing relations between the EU and Moscow. While there is no knowing whether Russia's Chairmanship will soften its position when it comes to the EU gaining permanent observer status or not, it is possible that Moscow may try to use it as a bargaining chip with Brussels to get sanctions lifted.²⁹ Russia's Ambassador at Large for the Arctic Cooperation Nikolay Korchunov recently said that the question of granting the EU observer status is not on the Council's agenda. But he went on to say that, "Russia would welcome the responsible approach of the EU to facilitating financing and the exchange of technologies for the implementation of investment projects in the Arctic, in particular, for the elimination of accumulated environmental damage, including in the field of radiation safety." Korchunov also mentioned the need for unblocking the financing for such projects through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, "which have significant potential to promote sustainable and harmonious development of the Arctic as a whole, could be an important step towards achieving common goals." He stressed that those funds were blocked due to "the conflict over Ukraine".³⁰ However, several of Russia's declared goals for its second time as chair coincide with EU Arctic priorities, such as fighting climate change, environmental protection, sustainable development, and strengthening international cooperation. The EU's current Arctic policy, set out in 2016, is based on these exact principals. More recently in July of 2020, the European Commission launched a public consultation to update its policy. Finished later that year, the consultation helped to give a wider view of the new challenges and opportunities in the Arctic region and confirmed the continued relevance of the original Arctic priorities. After

25 Elena Conde Perez and Zhakiin Valeriya Yaneva.2016."The European Arctic policy in progress". Polar Science. Volume 10, Issue 3, September 2016, pp.441-449, p.445.

26 Fernando Garcés De Los Fayos.2015. "The outcome of the ninth Arctic Council ministerial meeting", [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/549036/EXPO_ATA\(2015\)549036_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/549036/EXPO_ATA(2015)549036_EN.pdf).

27 Lily Haines.2015." EU bid to become Arctic Council observer deferred again", May 04, <https://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/05/eu-bid-become-arctic-council-observer-deferred-again-04-05>.

28 Kristine Offerdal.2011."The EU in the Arctic: In Pursuit of Legitimacy and Influence". International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis. Volume: 66 issue: 4, page(s): 861-877. doi.org/10.1177/002070201106600414, p.870.

29 Aliyev, Nurlan.2020."The EU Arctic Policy and Perspectives of Relations with Russia", Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Russland, December, 2020, https://www.fes-russia.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/1223-FESMOS-arctic-policy_12-2020-en.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1IYyo6i4FzYRltiHnnosjyZSI7AyzdALprTO_fG9GN0HGUG9fzzYvrT-k.

30 Nikolay Korchunov.2021. «V Arktike net problem, trebuyushchikh voyennogo resheniya», Yelena Chernenko, Gazeta „Kommersant“ №5 ot 15.01.2021, str. 5, Jan, 14, 2021, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4641929>.

that it was determined that the EU “has an important role to play in making the Arctic safe, stable, sustainable and prosperous, including through enhanced international cooperation.”³¹ Meaning the EU’s next communication will likely stress the same priorities.

When asked about the possibility of admitting new countries or organizations as observers during the Russian Chairmanship, Nikolay Korchunov responded that in those cases, “the Arctic Council is primarily guided by the criteria that the applicant country must meet.” According to him, expanding the rights of observers has not been discussed, also pointing out that observers already have significant opportunities for participating in joint projects under current conditions. Korchunov added that Russia considers it important to ensure observers, “balanced participation in the project activities of the Arctic Council, including projects in the field of sustainable development and ecology, and a fuller use of existing cooperation opportunities by them.”³²

Russia has come out saying it has no interest in delegating its share of responsibility for the Arctic to other countries. This came out over arguments that the Arctic Council has lost its relevancy and should possibly be replaced by a body that includes non-Arctic countries, the idea has zero support from Moscow. “This leads to another conclusion that time is ripe to give thought to concluding a treaty on the Arctic identical to the treaty on the Antarctic, where participating countries will have identical rights,» Korchunov said. He noted that the United States would oppose this as well, «In this respect it is impossible to disagree with U.S. Secretary of State Michael Pompeo’s statement made in May 2019 that there are two groups of countries – Arctic and non-Arctic,» Korchunov said. «He said so in relation to China, which positioned itself as a near-Arctic state. We disagree with this.»³³

However, since then Nikolay Korchunov has stated that «recently China has been much criticized for its increased interest in the Arctic region, they talk about the alleged threats from Beijing”, but, according to Korchunov, “It should be noted that this non-Arctic coun-

try refrains from military activities in the Arctic region, thereby contributing to the maintenance of low tension in the region and a constructive atmosphere for interaction.” He also noted that China, as an observer to the Arctic Council, makes a constructive contribution to its work.³⁴ What may seem to be contradictions in Korchunov’s statements actually explains Russia’s view on China’s involvement in the Arctic. Moscow welcomes China’s involvement in economic projects in the region but does not consider it to be an Arctic State and, accordingly, Moscow does not welcome any ambition by Beijing to become one.

CONCLUSION

Declared priorities of Russia’s upcoming Chairmanship are reflected in most recent state official’s documents and statements. Ensuring a high quality of life and well-being for the Arctic population and protecting indigenous peoples’ ways of life are also emphasized in other official policies – “Basic Principles of the Russian Federation State Policy for the Arctic to 2035” and “Strategy for Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security for the Period until 2035”.³⁵

Several violations of indigenous people rights in the Russian Arctic have been reported in recent years. Most probably, Russia will try to project itself as a promoter of the wellbeing of the Arctic indigenous people during its time as chair with the aim of increasing its positive image. However, it is difficult to say how well Moscow will succeed in achieving this goal. Recently, the chief of the FSB’s Border Guard Service, Vladimir Kulishov, stated that a number of foreign countries attempts for an inclusion of the waters of Russia’s exclusive economic zone and areas of the continental shelf into their zones of prioritized interest and the aspirations of foreign scientific institutions to access the potential resources of the seas under Russia’s jurisdiction, especially in the Arctic region, are growing. “Under the pretext of protecting the rights of indigenous peoples and the marine environment, various international organizations are attempting to restrict navigation along the Northern Sea Route, revise the legal and territorial status of the Arctic, and oppose Russia’s sustainable development of mineral depos-

31 European Commission. 2021. “Summary of the public consultation on the way forward for the European Union’s Arctic policy”, January 26, https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/summary-public-consultation-way-forward-european-union%E2%80%99s-arctic-policy_en.

32 Nikolay Korchunov. 2021. «V Arktike net problem, trebuyushchikh voyennogo resheniya», Yelena Chernenko, Gazeta „Kommersant“ №5 ot 15.01.2021, str. 5, Jan, 14.

33 TASS. 2020. “Russia has no intention of delegating responsibility for Arctic to other countries – envoy”, June 16, <https://tass.com/politics/1168111>.

34 RIA Novosti. 2021. “V MID ne uvideli ugrozy v deyatelnosti Kitaya v Arktike”, February 3, <https://ria.ru/20210203/arktika-1595802020.html>.

35 Aliyev, Nurlan. 2020. “Development in Difficult Times: Russia’s Arctic Policy Through 2035”, Russian Analytical Digest (RAD), No. 256. September 5, pp. 2-6, <https://css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RAD256.pdf>.

its,” Kulishov said.³⁶ Amidst such a threat perception and the securitization of its Arctic zone, it would be difficult for Moscow to promote and support the rights and wellbeing of indigenous people. Plus, such attitudes from high level security officials might challenge academic cooperation in the region. However, when it comes to issues such as climate change and cooperation on economic and rescue projects Russia indeed will be more cooperative.

Although the Arctic Council does not deal with military issues, Russia will try to organize meetings if not by the Chiefs of General Staff, than between military experts from the Arctic States during its Chairmanship. However, Moscow will most likely mainly try to use its Chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the realization of joint investment projects of Arctic States in its territory which is a main priority of Russia's Arctic Strategy.

³⁶ TASS.2020. "Glava Pogransluzhby FSB: yezhegodno v RF stremyatsya popast' 6 tys. nelegal'nykh migrantov" May 28, <https://tass.ru/interviews/8557449>. See also:

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SUMMARY



Moscow will most likely mainly try to use its Chairmanship of the Arctic Council for the realization of joint investment projects of Arctic States in its territory which is a main priority of Russia's Arctic Strategy.

Russia will try to project itself as a promoter of the wellbeing of the Arctic indigenous people during its time as chair with the aim of increasing its positive image. Amidst perceived threats to Moscow and the need to secure its Arctic zone, it would be difficult for Moscow to promote and support the rights and wellbeing of indigenous people. Plus, certain attitudes from high level security officials might challenge academic cooperation in the region.

When it comes to issues such as climate change and cooperation on economic and rescue projects Russia indeed will be more cooperative.



Several of Russia's declared goals for its second time as chair coincide with EU Arctic priorities, such as fighting climate change, environmental protection, sustainable development, and strengthening international cooperation. There is no knowing whether Russia's Chairmanship will soften its position when it comes to the EU gaining permanent observer status or not, though it is possible that Moscow may try to use it as a bargaining chip with Brussels to get sanctions lifted.

Russia considers it important to ensure observers "balanced participation in the project activities of the Arctic Council, including projects in the field of sustainable development and ecology, and a fuller use of existing cooperation opportunities by them." But Russia has no interest in delegating its share of responsibility for the Arctic to other countries. Moscow welcomes China's involvement in economic projects in the region but does not consider it to be an Arctic State and, accordingly, Moscow does not welcome any ambition by Beijing to become one.



Continuing calls by Russian officials to resume the meetings of Chiefs of General Staff of the Arctic States and dialogue between military experts could be explained by Moscow's understanding of the need to maintain open channels of communication with NATO member states in the increasingly militarized region. On the other hand, Moscow might want to attempt to soften Western state's position on the military intervention in Ukraine and little by little return to the state of relations pre Crimea. In this respect, the resumption of the Arctic Chiefs of Defense Forum may be another platform of dialogue which would also show acceptance of Moscow's realities by Western states.