

**Editorial Team:** Beata Surmacz (Director of ICE), Tomasz Stępniewski (Deputy Director of ICE), Agnieszka Zajdel (Editorial Assistant), Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, Jakub Olchowski, Konrad Pawłowski, Agata Tatarenko

**No. 786 (34/2023) | 15.02.2023**

ISSN 2657-6996  
© IES

Damian Szacawa

## **Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: long-term implications for the Arctic**

**Keywords:** Arctic, Norway, Russia, scientific research, science diplomacy

**Russia's invasion of Ukraine has also brought a number of consequences for regions away from the conflict. One such area is the Arctic, which includes, among others, the northern part of the Nordic states. Within the Arctic Council (AC), political cooperation with Russia has been temporarily put on hold, while part of the work of the Council is expected to resume once Norway assumes the chairmanship in May 2023. Areas where pragmatic cooperation has been dominant, such as scientific research, are also suffering long-term consequences.**

**Norway and the future of cooperation within the Arctic Council.** The reaction of the seven Western states of the Arctic Council<sup>1</sup> (the so-called 'Arctic-7', A-7) in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was unequivocal. On 3 March 2022, they halted their work in the organisation in which Russia has held the presidency since mid-2021. Published government statements indicate that Russia's aggression has undermined the fundamental principles of the AC, namely trust and respect for international law. At the same time, the A-7 states hope that the pause will be temporary and that the actions being taken will not create obstacles to a future return to normality. Nearly a year later and with the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is still uncertain if and when AC activities will be fully re-launched (in June 2022, cooperation was resumed at a working level, without Russia's participation). In the past, there has already been a downgrading of the importance of this regional institution, manifested by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov not attending a ministerial meeting in Canada in 2015 and another official meeting of the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) being cancelled after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Thereby, quite high and partly divergent expectations are placed on Norway, which will take over the 2-year chairmanship of the Arctic Council on 11 May 2023. On the one hand, there is a consensus that any political cooperation with Russia is out of the question as long as it wages war against Ukraine. However, several non-Arctic states, including notably China (see "IEŚ Commentaries", No. 130), are interested in continuing dialogue with all AC members. On the other hand, preserving the AC as the most important international forum for dealing with regional issues is one of Norway's main foreign policy tasks, which requires intensive diplomacy in the High North. Norwegian-Russian relations to date show that pragmatic cooperation is possible – in 2010, the two states signed an agreement on the delimitation of the maritime border and cooperation in the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean (the then foreign minister was today's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre). Additionally, in October 2022, the Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission decided on the distribution of quotas of cod to be fished. Among the considered practical solutions, for example, a proposal to activate technical contacts between the A-7 and Russia or to strengthen the competencies of the Arctic Council Secretariat in Tromsø are mentioned. Also, the preliminary outlined priorities of the Norwegian chairmanship, presented at the Arctic Frontiers 2023 conference by Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt (the full programme will be presented in March 2023), point to the pragmatic nature of future cooperation and include tackling climate change, protecting indigenous peoples' rights, and encouraging people to live in the High North.

**Challenges for scientific cooperation.** Collaboration between Arctic states within the Arctic Council occurs at three levels: the higher political level (put on hold after Russia invaded of Ukraine), the senior officials' level, and the working group level. At the latter, scientific cooperation takes place, which includes, among other things, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Established in 1996, the Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum to enhance cooperation, coordination, and collaboration between Arctic nations, Arctic indigenous peoples, and other Arctic residents on common issues in the region. The Arctic Council consists of 8 states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America. In addition, 13 non-Arctic states have observer status (including Poland since 1998).

development of best practices and recommendations for countering pollution and responding to crises as well as mapping climate and environmental challenges. The importance of the data acquired in the Arctic stems from the fact that the reports produced by the scientists contribute to the international climate and environmental negotiations under the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In the past, scientific cooperation has helped to reduce tensions between states, enabling them to work together at times when relations between them were tense (e.g., in the late 1980s). Today, the international sanctions introduced after Russia's invasion of Ukraine are also evident in the area of science and science diplomacy. Without access to Russian research facilities and cooperation between scientists, the scientific data collected is incomplete, making it impossible to present the best possible knowledge, which is often the basis for evidence-based decision-making. Therefore, limiting international scientific cooperation in the Arctic could have serious consequences for climate and environmental research. For these reasons, scientists warn that without data from the Russian territory, knowledge of ongoing processes (including climate change) is partial. However, emerging proposals to facilitate practical cooperation and information exchange with Russian actors should be juxtaposed with changes that have taken place in Russia's Arctic strategy.

Russia is the largest state in the Arctic, controlling more than 53% of the coastline (over 24,150 km). Approximately 2.5 million of Russia's population live in the Arctic, representing almost half of the population living in the Arctic. After the end of the Cold War, Russia perceived the Arctic as a crucial region for its geostrategic interests, mainly due to the energy potential of its oil and gas deposits (Arctic production accounts for about 25% and 80% of Russia's total production, respectively) and the development of maritime transport (future use of the Northeast Passage, connecting Europe and East Asia). However, a shift in narrative is evident in the successive strategy documents for this area (the latest from March 2020) – Russia now sees the Arctic as a site of international competition and considers its task to be the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Symbolic changes are accompanied by concrete political decisions, including a decree signed on 4 February 2023 by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, invoking the Law on Security of the Facilities of the Fuel and Energy Complex (Federal Law No. 256 of 2011), authorising the state-owned company Gazprom Neft, which operates in the Arctic, to create a private armed force (similar in structure to the Wagner Group).

## Conclusions

- Russia's war with Ukraine poses a new challenge for Arctic states, overlapping with other processes which have long been noted in the Arctic, i.e., advancing climate change accompanied by biodiversity loss as well as the energy crisis and the long-term consequences of pandemics. Together, they currently pose the greatest challenges for states and communities in the High North.
- In the past, cooperation between Arctic states was based on pragmatism, which made it possible to manage the region despite conflicting political and economic/energy interests (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea is the basis for delimiting maritime zones under the control of individual states). Now, following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the remaining Arctic states are reinterpreting Russia's interests and its thinking about security as well as Russia's role in the Arctic.
- The A-7 states cannot neglect geographical considerations, which is why, despite their disapproval of Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine, they believe that a certain degree of cooperation should be preserved. The suspension of long-term priorities and the reduction of political cooperation with Russia does not mean the absence of contacts at a lower, working group level. They are aimed at minimising the risk of misunderstandings, monitoring military activity, and increasing predictability (which is also facilitated by the increased military presence in the High North and the future NATO membership of Sweden and Finland, see "IEŚ Commentaries", No. 609).
- Scientific cooperation has been of great importance in the Arctic so far, even at times when relations between states have been tense. The link between science and diplomacy has traditionally helped to

reduce geopolitical tensions and facilitated the management of international resources. However, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the A-7 states' relationship with Russia has entered a new 'glacial' period, affecting global decisions being taken to address and mitigate climate change. Reducing international scientific cooperation in the Arctic could also have serious implications for social science and ocean ecosystem research.