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The Arctic Council: Main Development Milestones (To the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Council's Founding) *

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Abstract. The article examines the formation and development of the Arctic Council (AC; Council) from 1996 to 2021. It is noted that the Council was created as an intergovernmental "high-level forum" for the development of cooperation between the Arctic states, coordination of their actions in the interests of ensuring sustainable development of the region, protecting the environment, preserving the culture, traditions, and languages of the indigenous peoples of the North. The status, structure, and organisation of the Council's activities are characterised. It is emphasised that the Arctic Council does not deal with military security issues. There are six indigenous peoples' organisations and 13 observer states that participate permanently in AC. In the second part of the article, the author analyses Canada, the USA, Finland, Iceland, Russia, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden chairmanship results in the Arctic Council (from 1996 to the present day). Revealing the issues of continuity in the chairmanship of the AC founding states, the author focuses on new approaches of countries in the exploration and development of the Arctic through the activities of working groups. In contrast, joining the AC of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations is investigated for the first time. The author notes the growth of the authority and prestige of the Arctic Council in the Arctic arena of international relations. The preparation of the Russian Federation for the chairmanship of the AC (2021–2023), its program, and main events are analysed.

Keywords: *Arctic, Arctic Council, Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Norway, USA, Finland, Sweden, chairmanship, international cooperation, ministerial meeting, sustainable development*

Introduction

The history of the Arctic Council (AC, Council) began in 1989, when representatives of eight Arctic countries, at the initiative of the Finnish government, met in Rovaniemi (Finland) to discuss issues of environmental protection in the Arctic. In 1991, they adopted the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. The unification of these states was facilitated by the meetings of the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, which brought together delegations from the legislative bodies of the AC founding countries, as well as representatives of the European Parliament and delegates from the indigenous peoples of the Arctic region. As cooperation between these states developed, it became necessary to create their own organization. Officially, the Arctic Council was established on the basis of a declaration signed in Ottawa (Canada) on September 19, 1996 [1, Vylegzhaniin A.N.].

It should be noted that the Ottawa Declaration is not a fundamental international treaty; it was not submitted for ratification by the national parliaments of the participating states and was

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not registered with the UN as an international treaty. Its text outlines the main parameters for the functioning of the Arctic Council, in particular, an alternate two-year cycle of chairmanships of the participating countries is defined, a circle of permanent participant organisations is outlined, a decision-making method is fixed by consensus, which allows to combine efforts in solving common problems without imposing one's will on the others. It is specifically stated that the AC does not deal with military security issues¹.

The AC is an international regional structure designed to promote cooperation in the Arctic in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development of the circumpolar areas.

Status, structure and organisation of activities

The member states of the Arctic Council are Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States of America.

The founding members are five Arctic coastal states located on the coast of the Arctic Ocean (Denmark through self-governing Greenland, Canada, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States) and the three Arctic states with territories (Finland and Sweden) or territorial waters (Iceland) crossing the Arctic Circle. Five member states of the Arctic Council (Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Norway and the United States) are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), three member states (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) are members of the European Union, and Norway and Iceland are members of the European Economic Area created by the EU and EFTA.

It is important to emphasize that the five Nordic countries — Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden — have close regional cooperation in both domestic and foreign policy within the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers. All five Nordic countries are also members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), of which the Russian Federation is also a member.

Six organisations of indigenous peoples take part in the work of the AC on a permanent basis: the Arctic Athabaskan Council, the Aleut International Association, the International Gwich'in Council, the Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Saami Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East². These organizations are authorized to participate in the negotiations and decision-making process within the Council. The Permanent Participants category was created to ensure the active participation and enhanced consultations with representatives of the Arctic indigenous peoples within the framework of the Arctic Council.

¹ Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council 1996. Ottawa Declaration. Arctic Council. Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 19, 1996. URL: http://library.arcticportal.org/1270/1/ottawa_decl_1996-3..pdf (accessed 26 May 2021).

² Since 2014, the President of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation has been a deputy of the State Duma of the VI and VII convocations, Senator of the Russian Federation G.P. Ledkov.

There is an observer status in the Council for non-Arctic countries, international intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations. Currently, 13 states are AC observers: Great Britain, the Netherlands, Poland, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Switzerland; 12 intergovernmental organisations; one inter-parliamentary organisation; 12 non-governmental organisations. Observers may attend plenary meetings of the AC Senior Officials, as well as other events — upon invitation of the current Chairman of the AC. The list of observers is constantly growing.

Interest in obtaining observer status in the Arctic Council comes from states and organisations with a desire to influence its activities and decisions. Some have seen the expansion of observer status as a means of internationalising the management of Arctic affairs and limiting the sovereign rights of the Arctic states in their areas of national jurisdiction in the Arctic Ocean.

In fact, the main function of the observers is to monitor the work of the Arctic Council. They contribute to the work of the Council through participation in the activities of its working groups, at the meetings of which they have the opportunity to make statements after the member states and permanent participants, to submit written statements, and to introduce various documents for consideration. Observers may only propose projects for discussion through an AC member state or a permanent participant, and the amount of funding for any of the projects of the Arctic Council by an observer may not exceed that of the Arctic states.

The European Union is the “pending” observer state. At a ministerial meeting in Kiruna (Sweden, 2013), the Arctic Council “approved” the status of the European Union as an observer, but postponed the final decision because Canada opposed it. At the ninth AC ministerial meeting on 24 April 2015 in the Canadian city of Iqaluit, the European Union was again not granted observer status. It was decided that until the ministers of the Arctic states make a final decision, the European Union can only observe the work of the Arctic Council [2, Dudin M.N., Ivashchenko N.P.]. Currently, about 20 more organisations and countries are seeking observer status.

The Arctic Council is the most significant institution of international environmental cooperation in the Arctic. Its competences include obtaining reliable information about the state of the Arctic environment; conducting environmental monitoring; developing proposals and recommendations on pollution prevention and control for the subarctic states and observer countries.

Currently, the AC has the legal attributes of an intergovernmental international organisation: a permanent Secretariat of the Arctic Council, which has organisational and technical authority and, under a special agreement with the Norwegian government, is located in the Norwegian city of Tromsø (until 2013, it was located in the country holding the chairmanship). Member States agree to make regular contributions to the functioning of the Council. In 2016, it included the Secretariat of Indigenous Peoples (previously located in Copenhagen), established to support the activities of permanent participants in the AC. The co-location of the two Secretariats has contributed to closer contacts between them, enhancing the efficiency and capacity of each of them and streamlining the work of the AC as a whole.

The chairmanship in the AC: plans, achievements and failures

The chairmanship of the Arctic Council is carried out on a rotational basis. Each of chairing countries puts forward its own program of priorities in the Arctic policy. The working groups of the Arctic Council are created on the basis of consensus, and its projects are implemented jointly by all member states only in cases where their issues are in the common interests of all member states.

There are currently six such groups: Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP); Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP); Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR); Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG). Through their scientific activities, the governments of the Arctic countries have joined forces for full-scale environmental control. Their reports draw attention to the problems of the Arctic environment. The Council maintains a dialogue among scientists, politicians, indigenous peoples of the region.

The Arctic Council has task forces with time-limited activities that last until the desired results are achieved.

The highest body of the Council is the Ministerial meeting (usually at the level of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs), which is held every two years. It decides on the organisation's activities, signs documents, and rotates the chairmanship among its member countries.

Ministerial meetings are prepared and held by the presiding country; it reports on the results of its work for a 2-year period [3, Zhuravel V.P.; 4, Lyapchev D.Yu.].

Current issues of the Council's activities and the preparation of ministerial meetings are handled by the Senior Officials of the AC (official representatives of the AC member states, usually from foreign policy departments), who meet at least twice a year.

The first chairmanship of the AC was held by **Canada** from 1996 to 1998. The Iqaluit meeting in September 1998 approved the Council's Rules of Procedure, decided to develop an Arctic Council Action Plan to eliminate Arctic pollution and announced the establishment of the University of the Arctic, an international network of higher education institutions and Arctic research centres dedicated to research on northern issues. It was agreed that pollution management issues would always be at the top of the countries' chairmanship agendas. Two intergovernmental organisations (the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC)) as well as four non-governmental organisations were admitted to the AC at the Iqaluit Ministerial Meeting: the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region (SCPAR), the International Union for Circumpolar Health (IUCH), the Northern Forum and the World Wildlife Fund.

Under the **US** Chairmanship (1998–2000), the AC Action Plan to Eliminate Pollution of the Arctic and the Framework Document for Sustainable Development in the Arctic were prepared and approved. A joint project on assessing the impact of human activities on the Arctic climate was also prepared for launch, calling on representatives of the Arctic states to highlight in research

not only the climatic, but also the social, cultural and economic impacts of their activities in the Arctic region. Attention was drawn to the provision of remote medical services (telemedicine), cooperation between children and youth of the Arctic states, cultural and ecological tourism, and support for coastal fisheries. At the ministerial session in Barrow in 2000, 4 intergovernmental organisations were admitted to the AC: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), the North Atlantic Marine Mammal Commission (NAMMCO) and 3 non-governmental organizations: the Advisory Committee for the Protection of the Seas (ACOPS), the Circumpolar Conservation Union (CCU) and the International Arctic Social Science Association (IASSA).

The main directions of the **Finnish** Chairmanship (2000–2002) were sustainable development, developing the competence of Arctic residents on issues of concern to the region, and applying the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples of the North. For the first time, the topic of gender equality was addressed. At the ministerial session in Inari in 2002, one intergovernmental organisation was admitted to the AC: the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and 2 non-governmental ones: the University of the Arctic (UArctic) and the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA).

During the **Icelandic** Chairmanship (2002–2004), work was carried out to expand scientific and educational cooperation between the Arctic countries, develop information and communication technologies, and intensify interaction between the Arctic Council and the European Union within the framework of the EU Northern Dimension project. At the Reykjavik ministerial session in 2004, an intergovernmental organisation, the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and a non-governmental organisation, the Arctic Institute of North America (AINA), were admitted to the AC.

During the **Russian** Chairmanship (2004–2006), special attention was paid to sustainable development, pollution control, human capital development, climate change, and preparations for the International Polar Year (2007–2008). Energy issues were discussed for the first time.

During the **Norwegian** Chairmanship (2007–2009), the priority issues were the following: climate change, biodiversity conservation, human capital development, cooperation in disaster relief, study of the ocean environment, combating contaminants, joint monitoring programs in the Arctic region, as well as the results and legacy of the past International Polar Year.

During the **Danish** Chairmanship (2009–2011) in May 2011 in Nuuk (Greenland), the first ever “Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic” was signed in Nuuk, Greenland in May 2011, to create a unified regional search and rescue system in the Arctic, including coordination of rescue forces. A set of criteria has also been developed for the admission of countries as observers to the Arctic Council.

During the **Swedish** Chairmanship (2011–2013), an “Agreement on cooperation in the field of preparedness for responding to marine oil pollution in the Arctic” was adopted in May 2013 in

Kiruna. In 2011, Sweden presented its Arctic strategy. It justified the need to overcome gaps in knowledge of the Arctic natural systems, the need to expand expeditionary activities, to strengthen institutions for the transfer of experience and technology, networking and academic mobility (University of the Arctic), and to establish a regional information centre for environmental monitoring [5, Sweden's Strategy for the Arctic region...].

In 2013, **Canada** opened its second two-year AC Chairmanship. The permanent secretariat of the AC (Tromsø, Norway) was formed, the rules of its work were agreed; in 2014, the Arctic Economic Council was established as an independent organisation of the Arctic states' business communities³; a decision was made to establish a collective fund for joint financing of environmental projects — the Arctic Council Project Support Instrument; the composition of observer countries in the Council was expanded on the basis of previously developed criteria for the admission of new members to the Arctic Council as permanent observers [6, Zhuravel V.P., Antyushina N.M.]. It should also be noted that in April 2015, Iqaluit adopted a framework cooperation plan to prevent oil pollution from hydrocarbon production and shipping intensification in the Arctic and a framework document on the reduction of soot and methane emissions.

During the **US** Chairmanship (2015–2017), the Agreement on the Development of International Arctic Scientific Cooperation was adopted (entered into force in May 2018). A joint statement of intent to develop multilateral cooperation in the format of the Arctic Coast Guard Forum was also signed. Russia, the United States, Norway, Canada and Denmark signed, on the basis of consultations, an agreement to ban fishing in the international Arctic waters. The state and challenges of communication networks in the Arctic region were explored for the first time. At the Fairbanks ministerial session in 2017, 4 intergovernmental organisations were admitted to the AC: the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the OSPAR Commission, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the Western Nordic Council, as well as a non-governmental organisation — International Organization for Ocean Protection. It is important to note that, unlike Canada, the United States did not transfer the existing contradictions between the US and Russia on the issue of Ukraine and Syria to the work of the AC itself, which largely contributed to the positive results of their chairmanship [7, Zhuravel V.P.].

Finland's main areas of work (2017–2019) in the Arctic Council were: environmental protection, including the conservation of biodiversity in the northern polar zone; development of communication networks in the region; increasing the number of weather stations for monitoring the state of ice, the ocean and the atmosphere; educational programs for indigenous youth [8, Härkönen A.]. However, a joint declaration was not adopted, which was the first time in the AC history. This was an unprecedented case and the first public acknowledgement of the contradictions among the countries of the Council, especially the US, which blocked the draft document due

³ It consists of up to 3 representatives from the Member States and Permanent Participants of the AC. From Russia, representatives of Rosatom, PAO NOVATEK and PAO Sovcomflot participate in the NPP. Since September 2015, the NPP Secretariat has been operating in Tromsø (Norway).

to its mention in the text of the need to work together on climate issues. At the Rovaniemi ministerial session in 2019, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) was admitted to the AC.

Iceland's Arctic Council Chairmanship (2019–2021) has focused on protecting the Arctic marine environment; sustainable development of the fishing sector; reducing ocean pollution, combating marine debris; climate change, continuing work to improve the quality of weather forecasts in the Arctic region, further exploring the possibilities of increasing the efficiency of using marine resources; creating conditions for improving the lives of indigenous peoples; continuing activities to strengthen and enhance the role of the Arctic Council. Due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, some of the planned activities were canceled or not fully implemented [9, Krasnopolskiy B.Kh.]. The achievement of the chairmanship is the adoption of the Arctic Council Strategic Plan 2021–2030⁴, which could not be approved in 2019 due to the negative position of the United States.

On May 20, 2021, the AC ministerial session was held in Reykjavik, at which the chairmanship of the Council for 2021–2023 passed from Iceland to **Russia** [10, Zhuravel V.P.]. The priorities of the Russian chairmanship are: the Arctic population, including indigenous peoples; environmental interaction, including climate change; socio-economic development of the region; strengthening the Arctic Council as the main platform for multilateral cooperation in high latitudes. The Russian Federation intends to continue the search for a balance between the three main areas of sustainable development in the AC format: economic growth, social integration and environmental protection.

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin has approved the Concept of the Chairmanship and the Plan of its main events⁵, which includes 116 events grouped into 11 sections. The events will be devoted to discussing climate change and the ecology of the Arctic, indigenous peoples, emergency prevention, infrastructure development and sustainable shipping, economic cooperation, international scientific cooperation, youth, Arctic tourism, and cultural events. Yu.P. Trutnev, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation and Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Far Eastern Federal District, was appointed Chairman of the Organising Committee to prepare and ensure the Russian Federation's chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2021-2023. To date, about 20 events have been held. Every month, the activities of the Arctic Council under the Russian chairmanship are intensified, enriched in terms of content and forms of its implementation.

Russia's special responsibility for the AC chairmanship is manifested in the fact that it owns the largest Arctic territory and, most importantly, it has the longest coastline among the countries

⁴ Speech and answers to media questions by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov during a joint press conference with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland G.T. Thordarson following the talks, Reykjavik, May 20, 2021. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4739617 (accessed 26 May 2021).

⁵ Plan of main events in connection with the chairmanship of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Council in 2021–2023 dated April 30, 2021, No. 4161p-P2. URL: http://www.arcticandnorth.ru/upload/medialibrary/7f7/Plan-osn-merporiyatii_Arkticheskii_-soviet-2021_2023-godakh.pdf (accessed 20 May 2021).

of the Arctic “Five”. The Russian Federation has 22.600 km, Denmark — 5.958 km, Canada — 5.363 km, the USA — 3.272 km, Norway — 1.609 km [11, Baklanov P.Ya., Moshkov A.V., Romanov M.T.].

The amount of funding for events has been determined: in 2021, with the agreement of the Ministry of Finance of Russia and the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation, money will be allocated from the reserve fund. For 2022–2023, the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East will provide the necessary funds in the federal budget in the prescribed manner.

It should be noted that the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic may have an impact on the scale and decrease the number of planned mass events. The ongoing political tension in relations with the West may affect the meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials, the activities of the working and expert groups of the Arctic Council. There are still fears that sanctions pressure and accusations of Russia militarising the Arctic, violating environmental requirements and oppressing the rights of indigenous peoples of the North will increase on the part of some AC countries, which could affect the rhythm and timetable of its work.

Conclusion

During the period of its activity, the Arctic Council has carried out significant work on the study of the Arctic, adopting three important Agreements and organising work on 80 projects.

The capacity and effectiveness of the AC is evidenced by its contribution to the drafting and approval of the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters, which has been developed for more than twenty years (entered into force on January 1, 2017), the Minamata Convention on Mercury, adopted on October 10, 2013 of the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants of May 22, 2001, the formation of the University of the Arctic in 2001, which includes universities, research institutions and other organisations with expertise in the field of development of education and science about the North.

The Arctic Council has acquired the status of a unique international platform for interaction between the Arctic states and coordination of their policies in the region.

Russia takes an active part in the activities of the AC throughout its operation [12, Chater E.], representatives of ministries and departments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, Russian Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Russian Federation and etc.), as well as educational and scientific institutions: Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute of Roshydromet, North-Eastern Federal University named after M.K. Ammosov, the Kola Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Federal Research Center for the Integrated Study of the Arctic of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Insti-

tute of Oil and Gas Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Oceanology named after P.P. Shirshov, Russian State University of Oil and Gas (NRU) named after I.M. Gubkin, St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, the Institute of Arctic Technologies of the Murmansk State Technical University, etc.

The main result of Arctic cooperation is that the mutual interest in its strengthening and development has not allowed its activities to be frozen, despite the environmental risks arising here, military and political threats, and the actions of anti-Russian sanctions. Cooperation continues to develop, and the Arctic remains a zone of peace, international cooperation and political stability.

The accumulated experience of the Arctic Council demonstrates the effectiveness and productivity of cooperation among all the Arctic states within the limits established by its work, which can be considered optimal in the current international environment. This does not exclude the possibility of making certain changes to the established algorithm of the Arctic Council; however, these changes should not affect its fundamental foundations and principles [13, Voronkov L.S.].

In 1996–2013, the main efforts were aimed at solving organisational issues, identifying and consolidating the main priorities in its activities: issues of ecology, environmental protection, support for the indigenous peoples of the North. Great attention was paid to the creation and organisation of the AC working groups, as well as the establishment and development of international cooperation between the Arctic states. From 2014 onwards, each new chairmanship introduced new challenges into the Arctic issues caused by climate change, advances in science and technology, and the desire to improve the lives of the indigenous peoples of the North. Their agendas have combined the national characteristics of the states more clearly and proportionately with traditional and new trends in Arctic development and exploration.

Actual problems of the Arctic and the AC activities are reflected in a number of works by Yu.F. Lukin [14; 15; 16; 17], monograph by L.S. Voronkov [18] and the work of N.M. Antyushina [19]. Since 2015, the issues of the chairmanship of the Arctic countries in the AC have been constantly covered by the author in the journals “Modern Europe”, “Arctic and North”, “Scientific and Analytical Herald of the Institute of Europe RAS”, as well as at international and all-Russian scientific forums.

The decisive contribution to the activities of the Arctic Council, the growth of the authority and prestige of the Russian Federation in the Arctic direction was made by senior officials from Russia in the AC⁶. In the second half of the 1990s, these are representatives of the State Committee of the Russian Federation for the Development of the North (1995–1998), the State Committee of the Russian Federation for Northern Affairs (1999–2000), diplomats V.I. Churkin (2003–2006), A.A. Ignatiev (2006–2008), A.V. Vasiliev (2008–2014), V.V. Barbin (2014–2018). Since 2018, this position has been held by N.V. Korchunov. It should be noted that during the chairmanship of

⁶ Determined by the author during a conversation with A.A. Ignatyev, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Editor-in-Chief of the journal “Arctic Vedomosti”.

the Russian Federation in the AC from 2004 to 2006, V.I. Churkin and A.A. Ignatiev were the chairmen of the Committee of Senior Officials of the AC; since 2021, N.V. Korchunov has been holding this position.

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