





## POLICY PAPER


# How is the Russian Occupation in Ukraine Changing the Geopolitics of Arctic?

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\*This Policy Paper was written by **Pedro Montoya** | 14 April 2023

 Rue de la Loi 155, 1040 Brussels

 [office@vocaleurope.eu](mailto:office@vocaleurope.eu)

 + 32 02 588 00 14

## VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



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## Background

During the Cold War, the Arctic was a centre of Soviet-American tensions due to nuclear missiles at the North Pole. After the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet bloc, pressures decreased, the geostrategic relevance disappeared, and an era characterised by cooperation and collaboration was ushered in<sup>1</sup>. For example, regional institutions such as the Arctic Council<sup>2</sup> or international agreements such as the Illusitat Declaration, UNCLOS or the Polar Code have produced a rather unusual and exceptional governance model.

However, the ice that has recovered most of the Arctic Ocean has been melting for years. On the one hand, this change offers attractive economic opportunities, opening new maritime routes and exploiting scarce resources. On the other hand, it is a significant environmental challenge, as the Arctic is home of very rich fauna and flora. The balance between economic and ecological opportunities is usually called “the Arctic Paradox”<sup>3</sup>. Because of the area's growing economic and environmental issues, the Far North is getting more and more consideration from international actors. In this way, climate change and the new socio-economic opportunities it offers to the region increased tensions over the control of territory, the passage of goods and access to further resources. One small example was when, in the summer of 2007, the Arctic region hit global headlines with a blurry picture of a Russian titanium flag planted more than 4,000 m beneath the North Pole at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean. Russia put up a flag implying that the Arctic is Russian.<sup>4</sup>

The EU, for its part, only began to pay special attention to the region in 2008<sup>5</sup>, despite having three states represented in the Arctic Council and two members of the European Economic Area. Through a Commission Communication, the EU highlighted the interests and proposals for action of Member States and European institutions around three main policy objectives: *to protect and preserve the Arctic in unison with its population, to promote the use of sustainable resources, and to contribute to fostering multilateral governance*. It should also be noted that Russia, for its part, has historically considered the Arctic as a region of vital importance, especially during Stalinism. Despite the stand-by after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the arrival of Vladimir Putin has put the area back on the map, giving it the status of a “leading strategic resource base”.<sup>6</sup>

The EU's north neighbourhood has been always excluded from a common neighbourhood policy approach and the concept of European Neighbourhoods has been developed with an exclusive southern and east focus, as the northern was less controversial and populated<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the European Union has been hesitant, especially in the first decade of the 21st century, as it did not include the neighbourhood policy for the North as well<sup>8</sup>. In the second part, seeing that the other actors did make a move, the EU launched a series of documents explaining the importance of the region. Not only the

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<sup>1</sup> Mikkola, H (2019). The Geostrategic Arctic. *Hard Security in the High North, FIIA Briefing Paper*

<sup>2</sup> The current Arctic model governance is centred on the Arctic Council, which is the main forum for Arctic cooperation and it is made up of the eight Arctic States: Denmark, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Finland, The United States, Canada, and Iceland.

<sup>3</sup> Schunz, S., De Botselier, B., López Piqueres, S. (2021), “The European Union's Arctic policy discourse: green by omission”, IN: *Environmental Politics*, 30:4, pp. 579-599.

<sup>4</sup> Raspotnik, A. & Østhagen, A. (2019). What about the Arctic? The European Union's Geopolitical Quest for Northern Space

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2008) *The European Union and the Arctic Region*, COM 763, Brussels

<sup>6</sup> Nøhr, N. Ø. (2022). The cold consequences of war - An investigation into the effects of the Ukraine war on Russia's Arctic strategy. UiT Norges arktiske universitet

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> We could mention the “Northern Dimension Policy” that is addressed to Russia, Norway and Iceland, and Belarus is one of the observers of the policy. However, the dimensions they manage are environment, public health and social well-being, transport and logistic, and culture. Moreover, it is not focused on the Arctic Ocean nor security challenges.

countries directly involved are paying close attention to the situation, but also China. The reality is that climate change is causing a race for resources.

Despite this, and as mentioned above, cooperation has been prominent in the region. It even seemed to be a bunkered region, free from the influence of the other conflicts on the planet. However, Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and the subsequent annexation of Crimea began to influence Arctic regional institutions<sup>9</sup>, leading to a decline in trust in Russia by Atlanticist countries. On the one hand, after the Ukraine outbreak, Russian authorities revised the whole set of strategic doctrines, starting with the military doctrine in December 2014. This new doctrine shows a new tone by reflecting a greater focus on military aspects of the Arctic. For instance, while the 2010 version contains no mentions of the Arctic, the 2014 variant mentions the Arctic as an area to be protected by the Russian military. On the other hand, Western countries sanctioned Russian companies in the Arctic, especially LNG or oil ones, in response to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Indeed, after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, most military cooperation in the Arctic was suspended immediately. Due to the Ukraine crisis, relations between Russia and the West have reverted to a “late Cold War”<sup>10</sup> like a mix of conflict and cooperation. Most military and economic cooperation between Russia and the West was suspended, but other aspects of cooperation continued.

Thus, this policy paper seeks to analyse how the ongoing conflict in Ukraine after the Russian invasion in 2022 affects the Arctic region, especially in the wake of Western sanctions on Russia and the breakdown of most NATO and EU communication channels with Russia. The aim is to understand a critical phenomenon in developing European geopolitics and thus offer some keys for the EU to build its geopolitical space beyond the East and South.

## Current State of Play

To shed some light on the relationship between the conflict in Ukraine and the Arctic, I will not focus on state security policies in isolation. Instead, I will use a relational approach, i.e., recognizing that one state's security policy and internal politics are not formulated in isolation from the policies of other states. This is known as an interaction perspective<sup>11</sup>, which shows how Western and Russian Arctic's policy priorities fluctuate. This theoretical approach helps to grasp better how Russia's invasion of Ukraine can have spillover effects in a region as far as the Arctic. Thus, to answer the puzzle of this paper, I find three crucial and interrelated factors: security and geopolitics, energy and economics, and indigenous human rights.

On the one hand, current trends point to a further geopolitisation of the area and increased military tensions between Western and Russia. Since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict in 2014, the Arctic's stability has shifted toward systemic confrontation<sup>12</sup> between Western and Russia-China blocs. Furthermore, Sweden and Finland applied for NATO membership in May 2022 (and Finland's final entry into NATO on 4 April 2023), which shows a clear signal of the changing security dynamics in the Arctic. This candidacy marks a significant departure from Sweden and Finland's longstanding

<sup>9</sup> Griecius, G., & Fitz, E. B. (2022). Can Exceptionalism Withstand Crises? An Evaluation of the Arctic Council's Response to Climate Change and Russia's War on Ukraine. *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2(3)

<sup>10</sup> Byers, M. (2017). Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study. *International relations (London)*, 31(4), 375-402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117817735680>

<sup>11</sup> Blakkisrud, H. (2018) Introduction: Can Cooperative Arctic Policies Survive the Current Crisis in Russian-Western Relations? *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*. [Online] 9377–.

<sup>12</sup> Suslov, K & Kashin, V (2022) Arctic as a New Playground for Great Power Competition: The Russia–China–United States Triangle In *Arctic Fever: Political, Economic & Environmental Aspects* (pp. 305-332). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.

foreign policies, which have historically maintained a neutral position to balance between the Western bloc and Russia<sup>13</sup>. Although, at this moment, Russia needs to concentrate all its available resources on Ukraine battlegrounds, the Arctic map continues to occupy a primordial place in its strategic planning, especially after the perceived necessity of responding to that possible Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO.

The escalating confrontation between Russia and the West caused by the Ukraine war has profoundly affected the pattern of international interactions in the Arctic region, with Moscow re-evaluating its positions. On 31 July 2022, President Putin<sup>14</sup> approved a new naval doctrine, which defines the Arctic seas as an area of vital interest and identifies any expansion of the NATO military presence as a significant threat with conflict potential. Indeed, the naval doctrine pretends to explore undiscovered offshore resources in the Arctic shelf, thus rejecting the goal advanced by the new EU Arctic Policy<sup>15</sup>. The primary justification for this Russian strategic priority is the deployment of nuclear submarines, particularly strategic ballistic missile submarines on Russia's Kola Peninsula bases.

On the other hand, Russia's annexation of Crimea and subsequent full invasion of Ukraine has had other spillover effects on the Arctic, especially concerning energy and economics. The EU and the US targeted Russia's banking and financial sector, technology, and Russia's oil industry, and these sanctions have two consequences. First, Western interests in the Arctic are severely damaged, especially concerning Russia's mega-projects to extract liquefied natural gas in the Arctic. For example, the French company TotalEnergies, which holds a 19.4% stake in Novatek, Russia's largest private company, as well as stakes in the Yamal LNG project in the Russian Arctic, has declared its decision to exit such projects. Moreover, due to sanctions, it is incapable of selling its stake<sup>16</sup>.

Secondly, Russia hopes to develop and create a safer, more reliable transit route, the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which could allow it to take advantage of the shortest transit route between Europe and Asia. In this sense, the economic sanctions by the Western countries are prompting Russia to enhance its ties with China. Moreover, establishing the NSR could be a win-win situation for both China and Russia, as it will produce revenues for Russia and save resources for China<sup>17</sup>.

Finally, the Arctic has been home to Indigenous people since long before the international legal system of sovereign states came into existence. Now, Indigenous peoples have status as Permanent Participants in the Arctic Council and have recognised rights by International Law. However, environmental degradation coupled with climate change mainly affects the Arctic and the indigenous people who live there. Socio-economic pressures, accelerated by melting ice, are causing various migration and demographic processes<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, from the very start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Indigenous peoples of Russia have been extensively affected as, for instance, the number

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<sup>13</sup> Urban, Kathryn (2022, May 15). NATO's Nordic expansion will shake up the Arctic. *The National Interest*. Available at <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/nato%E2%80%99s-nordicexpansion-will-shake-arctic-202428>.

<sup>14</sup> Doctrine at the naval parade in St Petersburg. The text is available on the presidential website at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/69084>

<sup>15</sup> Join/2021/27, European Commission (2021), *A Stronger EU Engagement for a Peaceful, Sustainable and Prosperous Arctic*, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/totalenergies-withdraws-novatek-board-taking-37bn-loss-novatek-announces-discovery-new-arctic-gas#:~:text=In%20April%202022%20TotalEnergies%20had,LNG%20project%20in%20the%20Arctic>.

<sup>17</sup> Rehman, Maria (2022, August 23). Changing Contours of Arctic Politics and the Prospects for Cooperation between Russia and China. Available at <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/changing-contours-arctic-politics-prospects-cooperation-russia-china/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Arctic-Winter-College-2021-Policy-Briefs-3-Community-Wellbeing-1.pdf>

of Indigenous combatants in the war is proportionally higher than the number of ethnic Russian combatants<sup>19</sup>. This situation has aggravated the vulnerable position of Russia's Indigenous peoples and it will irreversibly damage their traditional lifestyles and culture. The protection of indigenous groups depends to what extent on healthy Arctic cooperation and governance. Until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this was the case, and governance was enviable, with numerous projects, such as INTERACT, to monitor environmental change in the Arctic primarily carried out by indigenous people.

Another major European project is Arctic Passion, which aims to develop adaptation and mitigation measures and increase knowledge of the impact on communities and sustainable development. The European Commission<sup>20</sup> mentioned that the Arctic Passion project “will build on monitoring and forecasting permafrost thaw and mapping permafrost parameters using Copernicus satellites and in situ observations, including data provided by indigenous groups”. However, it had to suspend all work in Russia or involve Scientifics at Russian institutions. This has affected various projects, including one that draws on traditional and Indigenous knowledge to co-create databases containing past environmental conditions.

On the other hand, the existence of states with observer status in the Arctic Council that have not condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine should not be underestimated, as is the case with China or India. Indeed, the UN Security Council failed to adopt a resolution<sup>21</sup> on ending the war in Ukraine after the Russian veto. Indeed, China, India, and the United Arab Emirates also abstained. From the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) only Singapore signed the draft. All of these countries are also stakeholders in the Arctic, and their weak stance against Russia suggests that, one way or another, Russia is not alone in alliance building. Therefore, the correlation of forces in the Arctic is not as clear-cut as it might first appear. Russia perceives the Sweden and Finland applications to NATO as an anti-Russian coalition.

Consequently, the future of Arctic geopolitics is expected to be dominated by militarisation, which has been seen in the region, especially since 2014. The region's perception of a NATO threat introduces an incentive for escalated Russian security measures. Finland and Sweden's accession to the alliance would represent a compelling domestic narrative of NATO encroachment in the Arctic as justification for additional Russian defences<sup>22</sup>. On the EU side, there was an open communication channel with Russia through the Northern Dimension Policy, which has also been paused since March 8 2022<sup>23</sup>.

The current state of play reflects a harmed Arctic development in multiple areas, especially after the Ukraine war and the subsequent consequences, such as sanctions and lack of institutional cooperation. Russia seeks new ways to strengthen military control and defence, seeking a more vital collaboration with Asian partners. In this regard, Russia's war in Ukraine prompted a change in attitudes from the

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<sup>19</sup>Ekaterina Zmyvalova, “The Impact of the War in Ukraine on the Indigenous Small-numbered Peoples’ Rights in Russia,” *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 13 (2022), and “The Rights of Indigenous People of Russia after Partial Military Mobilization” and Viktor Sulyandziga, “Russian Aggression against Ukraine and Indigenous Peoples of Russia”.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission. (2021). *A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0027>. Accessed 30 March 2023.

<sup>21</sup> <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14808.doc.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Urban, Kathryn (2022, May 15). NATO's Nordic expansion will shake up the Arctic. *The National Interest*. Available at <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/nato%E2%80%99s-nordicexpansion-will-shake-arctic-202428>.

<sup>23</sup> Joint statement by the European Union, Iceland and Norway on suspending activities with Russia and Belarus [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/northern-dimension-policy-joint-statement-european-union-iceland-and-norway-suspending\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/northern-dimension-policy-joint-statement-european-union-iceland-and-norway-suspending_en)

EU leaders and NATO countries towards increasing the distrust of Russia. The EU still needs to make precise moves on how this might affect the region's governance. At the same time, the impacts of climate change—including rapidly melting sea ice and increases in the number and intensity of wildfires—and its consequences for wildlife and human security persists. The following section will propose policy recommendations on EU-Arctic countries' defence and security cooperation to better prevent and respond to changing security threats and challenges in the Arctic.

## Policy Recommendations

Climate change has accelerated ice melting in the Arctic, leading to new resources in which many countries beyond the Arctic states are interested. In the 21st century, the Arctic region has stood out for its excellent governance between scientific organisations, big business, indigenous peoples and interested states (not just the Arctic states) and for being an area where other conflicts had no influence. However, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a disruption of governance in the Arctic, abruptly breaking the cooperation that prevailed in the central Arctic institution, the Arctic Council, and giving rise to new security challenges that the EU must face very shortly. In this context, it is challenging as many issues are at stake for the EU to succeed in affirming its position as a coherent, constructive, and significant geopolitical actor in the Arctic.

### #1 Expanding European Peace Facility from East to North

The new geopolitical arena after the war in Ukraine implies a fresh look at relations with Russia. Therefore, changing the EU's approach and role in diplomatic and international relations is necessary. In this new context, reality shows the importance of *hard politics* and military investment as deterrence. Finland and Sweden's entry into NATO is an example that the new geopolitical reality is marked by a sense of security based on a solid military base. In this sense, the European Peace Facility<sup>24</sup> is, so far, the tool that can best guarantee the EU's adaptation to the new security challenges. It was created to maximise the impact, effectiveness and overall sustainability of the EU's external action to ensure peace and security<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless, this fund targets Eastern Neighbourhood, Western Balkans, the Middle East and Africa. This fund brings significant improvements in medical and military supplies, and the EU must have military early warning mechanisms for potential Russian aggression in the Arctic and build efficient military institutions to respond to crises. Therefore, the EU must increase the range of its operations, thus reaching the North Pole and creating funds and military cooperation programmes with Canada, Norway or Iceland. This can be achieved through new joint missions in the Arctic using as a basis the European Peace Facility or the so-called Capacity-Building in support of Security & Development (CBSD) initiative under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), one of the EU's main financing instrument to finance interventions in the domain of crisis response and conflict prevention<sup>26</sup>. The European Peace Facility is reasonably new, and although it signifies a significant change in EU foreign policy<sup>27</sup>, it still needs to adapt to a reality shaped by *Hard Politics*. As we have seen with the Ukraine case, preparing for Russia's aggressiveness is crucial. Developing such funds in the Arctic would also increase the EU's credibility on security issues.

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-peace-facility-0\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-peace-facility-0_en)

<sup>25</sup> Deneckere, M. (2019). The uncharted path towards a European Peace Facility. *European Centre for Development Policy Management Discussion paper*, 248, 1-16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## #2 Resilience: Creating new opportunities for Formal Dialogue

Considering Russia's attack, cooperation between the remaining seven Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United States) and Russia has been completely altered, most significantly in the Arctic Council – the region's primary governance body chaired by the Russian Federation until May 2023. The Arctic Council has been paralysed since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the blockade by Western forces intended to punish Russia for its illegal attack. As it seems, the war will drag on, and the hitherto healthy Arctic institutions will continue to be stalled. The EU must therefore show leadership as an international actor interested in promoting healthy global governance and helping the region out of its current impasse. In addition to the Arctic Council being deadlocked, it lacks the competence to discuss military and security issues<sup>28</sup>, so creating a forum to fill this gap in Arctic governance would be desirable. The Illusitat Declaration 2008 is a solid basis for developing such a forum since it affirmed the commitment of Arctic coastal states to the legal framework governing the Arctic Ocean and the orderly settlements of any disputes. In addition to this forum, establishing a protocol to provide clear guidelines in case of unforeseen events would also be desirable<sup>29</sup>. In recent years we have seen an increase in military operations in the Arctic, both by NATO and Russia, which increases the likelihood that, at some point, there will be a mistake or accident that could trigger a significant conflict. Therefore, creating a code or action protocol would help avoid unforeseen damage. Finally, there are some bilateral agreements<sup>30</sup> on how to act in such cases, but this new protocol would be complementary.

## #3 Strengthening and expanding governance tools

The EU has stood out as an international actor whose geopolitical language or discourse differs significantly from traditional states. For example, from the outset, the EU has approached the Arctic from a global rather than regional governance point of view, establishing climate action, sustainable development and environmental research as EU priorities<sup>31</sup>. However, the results have not been as satisfactory as one might wish, as it has yet to achieve Observer status in the Arctic Council. Although the EU is not an observer member in the Arctic Council, the EU is an ad hoc observer since actively finances and cooperates with the working groups in which the Arctic Council is organized and, through the European Commission, is a member of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the other body for intergovernmental cooperation. The EU norms apply to the Arctic region through Sweden, Finland and Denmark. Through this leverage, the EU has the task of identifying areas where the Arctic's multilateral governance can work again. To this end, the EU should pursue different lines of diplomacy and dialogue through the actors least involved in the Western-Russian conflict. This is the case of non-state actors such as scientific organisations or businesses interested in the region's stability and will now play a more important role in Arctic multilateral governance<sup>32</sup>.

In this sense, fostering socio-economic development in the region should be vital in returning to a new normality in the Arctic. Projects such as Arctic Passion, which funds environmental research and supports the welfare of indigenous groups, should therefore be of paramount importance to the EU. Now is not the time to withdraw from aid programs and funds that support economic development. Instead, the better the welfare and union of non-state actors in the region, the more likely tensions will diminish<sup>33</sup>. Bringing together researchers regardless of nationality to share insights on a common concern, such as

<sup>28</sup> <https://es.euronews.com/2021/05/20/que-es-el-consejo-artico-y-que-quiere-conseguir>

<sup>29</sup> Berbrick, W., Gosnell, R., Saunes, L., and Thompson-Jones M. (2021) Preventing Conflict in the Arctic with Russia starts with Dialogue. *The National Interest* available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/preventing-conflict-arctic-russia-starts-dialogue-179593?page=0%2C1>

<sup>30</sup> Incidents at Sea Agreements between The United States and Russia

<sup>31</sup> Gricius, G. & Raspotnik, A. (2023) The European Union's 'never again' Arctic narrative. *Journal of contemporary European studies*, 1–14.

<sup>32</sup> Devyatkin, Pavel (2023) Can Arctic Cooperation be Restored? *The Arctic Institute*. Available at: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/can-arctic-cooperation-restored/>

<sup>33</sup> Ibis



the USC-NSF Conference on Strategic Ambition and Environmental Constraint and the Calotte Academy are examples of citizen diplomacy. Therefore, the EU should create a vision for the region that encompasses the complexity of sustainable development, provides more business opportunities, and addresses demographical challenges. Increasing business funding schemes for innovators and entrepreneurs and funding for Arctic science and observation would help to create a more interconnected and outward-looking region that is more conducive to healthy and resilient multilevel governance that is more cooperative than confrontational.

#### #4 Going beyond the Northern Dimension

The EU's typical approach towards its neighbours has been to bring individual states closer to the European model, with a view to eventual EU membership or for the sake of stabilisation and the promotion of the rule of law and trade agreements. This approach is unthinkable in the Arctic<sup>34</sup>. The EU cannot use these same instruments of influence in the Arctic because states are already members, or are close to becoming members but have refused to join (Norway), or are third powers (Russia, US, Canada). It must therefore convince Arctic states of its usefulness and added value in other ways. Unlike its southern and eastern neighbours, the EU has a specific 'regional system' in the Arctic with the Arctic states at its core. The EU has never projected itself territorially by defining a particular neighbourhood policy for this region: the Arctic policy is not a neighbourhood policy, unlike the East or South neighbourhood policies. Thus, its discourse is often deliberately ambiguous depending on the geographical position and point of view it adopts in Arctic-related documents: sometimes as a neighbouring external actor, sometimes as an Arctic actor, and sometimes as both. This lack of consistency hampers the EU's ability to act as a geopolitical actor and indicates its difficulty in defining a coherent vision and policy. The Northern Dimension (ND) is an example of inconsistency in approaching the Arctic as it was elaborated as a partnership between the EU, Norway, Iceland, and the Russian Federation, without the aim of establishing a strategy in the Arctic region. It is focused on four primary sectors<sup>35</sup>: environmental issues, nuclear safety, organized crime, and the special status of Kaliningrad.

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine and establishing a new geopolitical arena in Europe and the Arctic, the EU can adapt to this new reality and have clear and precise objectives beyond the ND. These policies have been beneficial in recent years regarding cooperation<sup>36</sup>, including with Russia, but the current situation mentions that the northward approach must change. In this sense, setting up an Arctic policy where relations with Canada, the United States, and Greenland (Norway and Iceland are already part of the EEA) seem necessary. Therefore, in addition to the Northern Dimension, it would be desirable to create an exclusive external action instrument for the Arctic, where, for example, a committee would be formed where senior officials from the Atlantic states would meet and where the EU would have an essential role in decisions involving the region. Cooperation with countries such as Canada or the United States is necessary, and therefore they cannot simply have observer status, as is the case with the ND.

## Conclusion

In this research, I have attempted to shed some of light on the relationship between the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the Arctic region. To do so, I used a relational theory approach by recognizing

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<sup>34</sup> Canova, E. (2020) Pour une prise en compte de la géographie dans la politique arctique de l'Union européenne. *Études internationales (Québec)*. [Online] 51 (1), 89–.

<sup>35</sup> Powell Richard, 2011, « From the Northern Dimension to Arctic Strategies? The European Union's Envisioning of the High Latitudes », dans Luisa Bialasiewicz (dir.), *Europe in the World: eu Geopolitics and the Making of European Space*, Farnham (R.-U.), Ashgate : 105-126.

<sup>36</sup> Bailes, A. J., & Ólafsson, K. Þ. (2017). The EU Crossing Arctic Frontiers: The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Northern Dimension, and EU-West Nordic Relations. In *The European Union and the Arctic* (pp. 40-62). Brill Nijhoff.

# HOW IS THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION IN UKRAINE CHANGING THE GEOPOLITICS OF ARCTIC?

that one state's security policy and internal politics are not isolated from the policies of other states. After analysing the events following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it can be seen that tensions between blocs have increased, and it seems that cooperation institutions where Russia is present will be kept at a standstill. On the other hand, the EU started to be interested in the Arctic region in 2008, but it has yet to find cohesion and a clear strategy in its policies. The new geopolitical reality brought about by the war in Ukraine provides an essential opportunity for the EU to exercise leadership. In this way, understanding the phenomenon in the Arctic properly is crucial for developing a European geopolitical strategy, which goes beyond the East and South. A possible conflict in the Arctic could be within the EU's territory. Therefore, outreach to this region is crucial to bring out the Union's geopolitical capacity and defend its citizens from a possible conflict on its territory.

## VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

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