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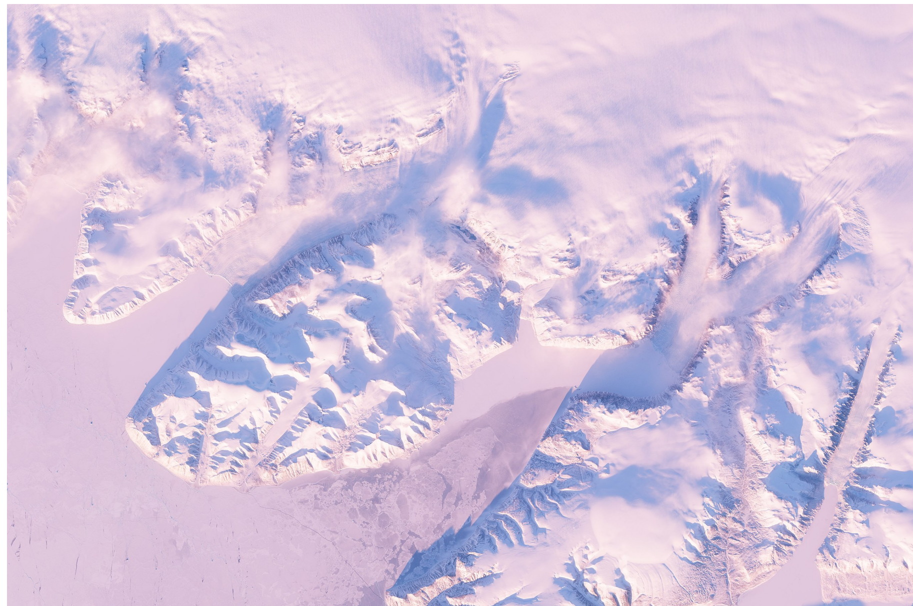
The EU in a changing Arctic

The development of the EU's Arctic role

Master's thesis in European Studies
Supervisor: Tobias Etzold
November 2022



Katabatic winds scrap the snow off Greenlandic outlet glaciers around Siorapaluk, 6 Mar. 2021./ Julien Seguinot

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Abstract

This thesis is a longitudinal case study with the aim of investigating and explaining the development and change of the EU as an actor in the Arctic since the region fully emerged on the global and European political agenda in 2007/2008. In seeking to explain the developmental path of the EU's role in the region, this study adopts the process-oriented actorness approach developed by Bretherton and Vogler – examining the EU's engagement with the Arctic region along the dimensions of opportunity, presence and capability. Thus, the EU's development as an Arctic actor is examined and explained in relation to the political opportunity structure it has had to navigate in pursuit of its Arctic role, the multiple dimensions of its extensive and developed regional presence, and the ability of the EU's own policymaking to capitalize on this presence and develop coherent and concrete narratives and objectives for its engagement. The EU's policymaking towards the Arctic is analysed sequentially through the four iterations of the EU's Arctic policy – adopted in 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2021.

The findings of the study show that the EU's development as an Arctic actor has been slow, incremental and non-linear – enabled by an extensive regional presence as a source of structural power, but significantly constrained by the opportunity structure of the Arctic regional system. Through a complex interaction between EU policymaking and the Arctic opportunity structure – encompassing pushback, adaptation, consolidation and reaction – the developmental trajectory of the EU as an Arctic actor has shifted between positive and negative developments in terms of scope, depth, ambition and narrative. The study concludes that the EU to this point has developed an Arctic role that is relatively fragmented, its actorness being exercised within a series of functional and issue-specific niches informed by presence and opportunity. However, significant and still-developing events within the Arctic opportunity structure following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as new approaches in EU policymaking towards the Arctic seen in the 2021 EU Arctic policy means that this situation may be set to change.

Keywords: European Union, Arctic policy, Arctic governance, actorness, presence.

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Denne avhandlingen en longitudinell casestudie, som har som mål å undersøke og forklare utviklingen og endringen av EU som aktør i Arktis siden nordområdene gjorde inntreden på

den globale og europeiske politiske agendaen i årene 2007/2008. For å forklare utviklingsen til EUs rolle i regionen, tar denne studien i bruk den prosessorienterte aktørtilnærmingen utviklet av Bretherton og Vogler – og undersøker EUs engasjement i langs dimensjonene mulighet, tilstedeværelse og kapasitet. Dermed blir EUs utvikling som en arktisk aktør undersøkt og forklart i lys av: 1) den politiske mulighetsstrukturen den har måttet navigere i søken etter sin arktiske rolle, 2) de mange dimensjonene ved dens omfattende og utviklede regionale tilstedeværelse, og 3) EUs kapasitet i politikkutforming til å kapitalisere på muligheter og tilstedeværelse, og utforme konkrete målsetninger og narrativer for sitt engasjement. EUs arktiske politikkutforming vurderes utifra en sekvensiell analyse av de fire versjonene av EUs Arktispolitikk – fra 2008, 2012, 2016 og 2021.

Funnene i studien viser at EUs utvikling som en arktisk aktør har vært langsom, inkrementell og ikke-lineær – muliggjort av en omfattende regional tilstedeværelse som en kilde til strukturell makt, men betydelig begrenset av mulighetsstrukturene i det arktiske regionale systemet. Gjennom et komplekst samspill mellom EUs politikkutforming og den arktiske mulighetsstrukturen har utviklingsbanen til EU som en arktisk aktør vist både positive og negative utviklingstrekk når det gjelder omfang, dybde, ambisjoner og narrativ. Studien konkluderer med at EU fram til nå har utviklet en arktisk rolle som er relativt fragmentert, og dens 'aktørskap' har i stor grad blitt utøvd i funksjonelle og saksspesifikke nisjer, påvirket av tilstedeværelse og muligheter. Samtidig gjør potensielle endringer i den arktiske mulighetsstrukturen i kjølvannet av Russlands invasjon av Ukraina, samt en ny tilnærming i EUs politikkutforming overfor Arktis at denne situasjonen kan tenkes å være i endring.

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List of abbreviations

A5 – The 'Arctic five': Canada, the United States, the Russian Federation, Denmark and Norway.

A8 - The 'Arctic eight': Canada, the United States, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Finland, Iceland, the Kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

AC – The Arctic Council

AEPS – The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy

BEAC – The Barents Euro-Arctic Council

CAO – The Central Arctic Ocean

EU – The European Union

EEA – The European Economic Area

EEAS – The European External Action Service

EEC – The European Economic Community

EC – The European Commission

EGD – The European Green Deal

EP – The European Parliament

GHGs – Greenhouse gases

IMO – The International Maritime Organization

IMP – The Integrated Maritime Policy

ND – The Northern Dimension

NSR – The Northern Sea Route/Northeast Passage

NWP – The Northwest Passage

OCTs – Overseas Countries and Territories

TFEU – Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UNCLOS – UN Convention of the Law of the Sea

WTO – World Trade Organization

1: Introduction

1.1 The EU and the Arctic region

On the 13th of October 2021, the European Commission together with the High Representative adopted the European Union's new Joint Communication on Arctic Policy – titled "A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic". This constitutes the fourth iteration of the European Union's Arctic policy, following Communications published in 2008, 2012, and 2016.

The process of developing a comprehensive EU policy towards the Arctic region has now been underway since 2007. This process has proven to be both "controversial and complex" (Østhagen 2013:71), owing the complexities of formulating a cohesive policy for a complicated region populated by established and motivated actors. The process of developing the EU's role in the Arctic has involved at times intense interactions between a wide range of actors, both between the Union's institutions and the Member States, and between the EU and the other Arctic powers (Wegge 2012:10).

Since the late 2000s, the Arctic has remerged into the global spotlight, driven in large part by the dramatic and accelerating effects of global climate change on the region. The profound climatological and environmental changes taking place in the Arctic presents a serious challenge for the region's communities and livelihoods. Furthermore, the consequences of melting ice sheets, summer wildfires and thawing permafrost in the Arctic are being felt outside the region and contribute to a vicious feedback cycle that is accelerating warming at the global level (Chuffart and Raspotnik 2019:158).

At the same time, the physically changing Arctic landscape is also resulting in new opportunities for exploitation. The receding sea ice means new waterways, such as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and the Northwest Passage (NWP), become suitable for large-scale marine transport. By the same token, decreasing ice coverage is altering the conditions for extractive industries, putting considerable Arctic resources within reach (Østhagen 2011:7). The increased interest in Arctic, driven both by crisis and opportunity, has driven an influx of external actors to engage more deeply with Arctic affairs (Olesen 2015:49). Consequently, the perceived geopolitical significance of the region has been increasing. Driven in part by an increasing demand for resources, as well as ideal concerns for its northern neighbourhood, the European Union has been turning its attention northward for the

past decade and a half, with varying degrees of success. In becoming an Arctic actor, the EU has had to develop its role within a regional system of established and motivated state actors whose positions have not always aligned with regional interests and ambitions of the Union (Hossain 2015:97).

Following the end of the Cold War, new opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation in the Arctic has given rise to a regional institutional framework 'by and for' the Arctic states. This system is state-centric, favouring the sovereignty and exclusive rights of states with a direct territorial stake in the region at the expense of other actors (Ingimundarson 2014:191). The EU, whose territorial presence in the region is not commensurate to its *de facto* impact, has thus had to navigate a challenging landscape in establishing its regional role and legitimacy. Instead of territorial presence, the primary enabler and legitimizing factor for the EU's Arctic engagement has been the non-territorial aspects of its regional presence – its functional contribution as a regulator, funder, climate leader and economic stakeholder.

Thus, alongside the difficulty in attaining Arctic legitimacy, 'capturing' and exploiting the multidimensionality of the EU's impact on the Arctic has remained a core challenge for EU policymakers. Furthermore, the inherent complexity of the Arctic as a policy area for the EU, encompassing both internal and external elements and a broad range of interests, has presented further challenges in developing a cohesive or integrated policy towards the region (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021a:1163).

1.2 Purpose and research question

This study sets out with the objective of exploring and explaining the character and development of the EU's role in the Arctic since the region truly emerged on the European policy agenda in 2007-2008.

Put simply, the question this study seeks to answer is this: **How and why has the European Union's Arctic actorness developed and changed between 2007/2008 and 2021?**

In answering this question, this study will draw on the process-oriented 'actorness' approach developed by Bretherton and Vogler (2006) to provide an analysis the development of the EU's adopted Arctic policies from 2008 to 2021 considering internal and external developments. Thus, the study seeks to assess how the EU's role as an actor has been developed and affected over time.

This analysis conceptualizes the development of the EU's Arctic role as an iterative process, wherein EU policy- and decisionmakers must continually reassess their understanding of the Arctic, and the EU's place within it, in response to interactions with the external environment of structures, ideas and events that constitutes the Arctic regional system. The developmental trajectory of this process is seen as conditioned by three broad factors.

The first is the conditions imposed on the EU's role development by the specific constellation of opportunities and constraints presented by the Arctic regional system – its structures and the actors within them. The second factor is the enabling conditions for EU Arctic engagement represented by the EU's existing and developing *presence* in the region, encompassing not just territory but also functional dimensions such as legal powers, economic interdependence, and the external dimensions of the EU's internal policies. This presence provides interlinkages that legitimize engagement, in addition to tools and leverages that, if instrumentalized, can be used to influence Arctic developments. The third factor relates to the actions of EU policy- and decisionmakers, and their ability to formulate concrete regional objectives and policy actions that correspond to Arctic opportunities and capitalize on the elements of the EU's regional presence.

1.3 Literature review

The EU's turn towards the Arctic has elicited considerable scholarly interest, the findings of which are important contributary elements to this study. The body of scholarly work since 2008 on the EU's forays into the Arctic political space is considerable and will be referenced and reviewed throughout this study.

The development of the EU's policy has been extensively assessed from a variety of angles. Excellent studies exist examining the EU's Arctic policy development within specific issues, such as Airoldi (2020) on security, Chuffart et al. (2021) on sustainable development, Dobson and Trevisnaut (2018) on climate change and energy, and Ringbom (2017) on marine transport. Additionally, Raspotnik and Østhagen's works regarding EU-Arctic fisheries issues (2019 and 2021b) are highly informative. This study seeks to contribute this body of work by iterating within an actorness-based analytical framework.

As the development of the EU's Arctic policy has been subject to considerable scholarly interest, a number of overarching assessments have been produced as the policy has developed. These include Østhagen (2011 and 2013), Pérez and Yaneva (2016), Stępień and

Koivurova (2017) as well as Stępień and Raspotnik (2020). This study seeks to contribute to this work by incorporating post-2020 developments such as the adoption of the 2021 Arctic Policy.

Studies of early EU Arctic development that include the activity of external actors, such as Offerdal (2011) and Wegge (2012) also play a role in this study. So do studies of the EU's international relations in the Arctic political space, such as Hossain (2015), Bailes and Ólafsson (2017) and Biedermann (2021). Additionally, Raspotnik (2018) on the EU and Arctic geopolitics constitutes one of the most exhaustive studies so far on EU policy and role development in the Arctic, from a critical geopolitics perspective. Alongside Koivurova et al. (2011)., it is also a significant as a study of the EU's Arctic presence.

Broader analyses of the Arctic political space are also significant to this study of the Arctic's political 'opportunity structure'. These include Ingamundarson (2014) and Wilson (2016)'s work on the Arctic Council, as well as EU-commissioned reports on Arctic politics such as Stang (2016) and Jokela [ed.] (2015).

Pieper, Winter, Wirtz and Dijkstra's article on EU actorness in Arctic governance (2011) has been an important influence and this work should in some regard be seen as iterative upon it. Utilizing the Jupille and Caporoso actorness approach, the paper examines the EU's actorness along critical Arctic policy areas. This study aims to iterate on these authors' work, by adopting an alternative actorness approach, and incorporating developments of the past 11 years.

Taken as a whole, this study seeks to make a novel contribution to research on the EU's development as an Arctic actor, utilizing a process-oriented actorness approach that has so far not been applied to the Arctic context. In incorporating recent developments, it likewise seeks to complement to the substantial body of excellent work conducted within the field.

1.4 Outline

The contents of this study are organized into eight chapters. The following chapter outlines the study's analytical framework and research design. The third chapter identifies the key EU interests that underpin its regional agenda and development as an Arctic actor. While this is outside the analytical framework as established by Bretherton and Vogler, these impetus factors are considered casually significant, providing essential premises for the EU's Arctic engagement.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are organized around the three dimensions of Bretherton and Vogler's actorness concept – opportunity, presence and capability – in an Arctic context. Chapter 4 examines the Arctic regional system as an opportunity structure for EU role development. Chapter 5 examines the multiple dimensions of the EU's Arctic presence. Chapter 6 analyses the four adopted EU Arctic policies with regard to their context and content as expressions of EU Arctic policymaking capability.

Lastly, the seventh chapter discusses the larger findings of the study, providing the basis for the conclusions and suggestions for further research presented in chapter 8.

2: Studying Arctic actorness - concepts and theory

2.1 How do we define the Arctic?

In discussing the EU's interests, opportunities, presence, and role development in the Arctic region, it is important to first establish an understanding of what the Arctic *is*. The term 'the Arctic' clearly denotes a physical, geographical region. However, no definition of its physical limits is universally accepted or applicable (Raspotnik 2018:30). The region's boundaries have been defined differently by various organizations or government bodies, often made-for-purpose for applicability within a set of issue areas.

The closest thing to a 'intuitive' signpost for the regional delimitation of the Arctic is the Arctic Circle, at 66° 33′ northern latitude. Using this as our boundary, the contemporary Arctic encompasses the northernmost territories of eight states – The United States (via Alaska), Russia, Canada, Iceland (via Grímsey), The Kingdom of Denmark (via Greenland), Norway, Sweden and Finland (Raspotnik 2018:30). These states are known as the 'Arctic eight' (A8), by virtue of their territoriality.

In addition to this general definition, some issue-specific Arctic definition exist, which are more expansive. For example, the definition provided by the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) commissioned by the Arctic Council includes several areas south of the Arctic Circle in its definition of the region. Notable inclusions are the totality of Iceland and Greenland, as well as the Faroe Islands (Young and Einarsson 2004:17-18). A common denominator among these included near-Arctic regions are strong historical, cultural, and economic links to the wider Arctic (Jokela 2015:36). At the very least, such expanded delimitations show us that 'Arcticness' can derive in part from functional linkages – not just geographical signposts.

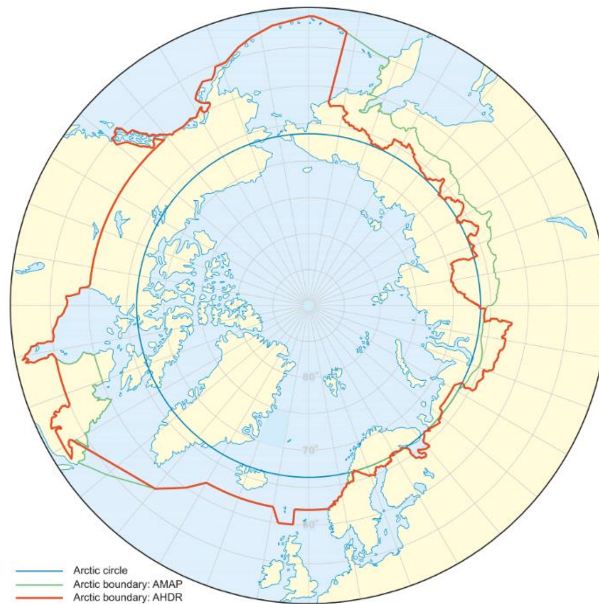

Fig. 1 – AHDR map of the Arctic
Source: Dallman 2004:18

Within the European Union's own policy documents, the conventional Arctic Circle definition is used when delimiting the geographical extent of the region. Therefore, this analysis will do so as well unless otherwise noted. To avoid confusion, areas falling within the definition of the 'AHDR Arctic' south of the Arctic Circle will be referred to as 'near-Arctic'.

Whichever definition is used, some general statements as to the geographical characteristics of the region hold true. The Arctic is a vast but sparsely populated region, with only about four million inhabitants. It is characterized by a cold and harsh, though warming climate, and by its unique ecosystems. Taken as a whole, the region also has a distinctly maritime character, encompassing vast ocean spaces, including the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO). As a function of its physical characteristics and ecosystems, the Arctic is also home to considerable amounts of natural resources, both living and non-living.

Despite these generalities, the Arctic is also home to considerable diversity. human population of the Arctic encompasses many distinct communities, including indigenous peoples. These communities vary considerably with regards to their size, cultures, and economic bases. The diversity of the Arctic's human communities also naturally entails variance in the challenges and opportunities they face as the Arctic changes – and

consequently what political questions are considered most pressing and relevant. This in turn adds complexity to the work of policy- and decision-makers when attempting to devise comprehensive or integrated policies towards the region.

The circumpolar and European Arctic(s)

Given the diversity of the Arctic, it will at certain times be necessary to distinguish between its constituent parts for the purpose of analysis. In discussing the development of the EU's role in the Arctic, we must at certain points distinguish between the wider, circumpolar Arctic and the European Arctic. As a sub-region, this area has certain characteristics that set it apart from other areas in the Arctic in ways that are highly relevant for the EU.

In the Commission-funded SADA report ('Strategic Assessment of Development of the Arctic'), the European Arctic is defined as encompassing the area stretching from Greenland to north-west Russia (Stępień et al. 2014:3), including Iceland, the Faroe Islands and the Svalbard archipelago. Out of the Arctic's four million inhabitants, 1.3 million reside in the European Arctic (Biedermann 2020:168).

One natural aspect of this sub-region that makes it particularly relevant to the EU is its proximity to the Union and interconnectedness with the rest of Europe. More than in other parts of the Arctic, the EU is deeply connected to the region through geography and functional linkages. The European Arctic encompasses the Arctic territories of EU members Sweden and Finland, the EEA members Norway and Iceland, as well as Greenland (Stępień and Koivurova 2017:19). As such, the region encompasses those parts of the Arctic where the legal reach and economic significance of the EU is strongest (Raspotnik 2018:69-70, 75-76). As will be discussed below, it is also where the institutional presence of the EU is most pronounced, through its role in sub-regional arrangements such as the Northern Dimension and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. In many respects, the degree to which we conceive of the EU as either an *internal* or *external* actor in the Arctic depends significantly on how much the matter at hand relates to the European Arctic (Stępień and Koivurova 2017:19).

In comparison to the wider Arctic, the European Arctic faces its own set of EU-relevant policy-related challenges. Circumpolar Arctic affairs frequently have a strong maritime component, encompassing fisheries, shipping and marine biodiversity. By contrast, the European Arctic 'issue complex' has a more terrestrial component – encompassing issues

such as land-based transport networks, regional development, mineral extraction and cross-border cooperation (Stępień and Koivurova 2017:28-29).

In many scholarly discussions and political discourses, a distinction between the European and circumpolar Arctic(s) is only made implicitly, giving rise to confusion (Stępień and Koivurova 2017:27). As this distinction is analytically significant for discussions of the EU's Arctic role, this study will make the distinction explicitly where applicable.

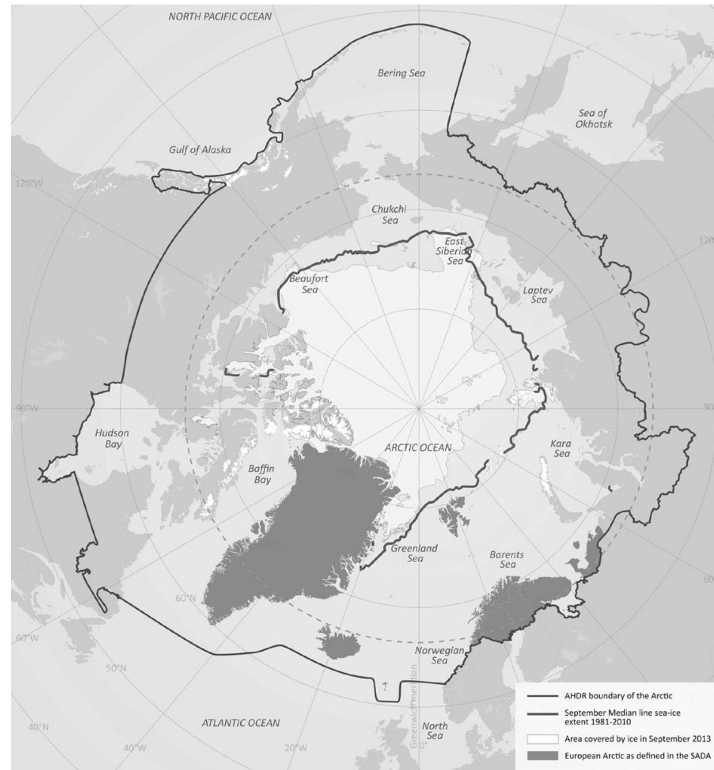

Fig. 2 – Map of the European Arctic
Source: (Stępień, Kankaanpää, & Koivurova 2014:4)

2.2 The meaning of actorness

The European Union's nature as an international actor has proven difficult to conceptualize within conventional theories of international relations, where traditional states are the conventional units of analysis (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:12, Pieper et al. 2011:228). With statehood serving as the conventional benchmark for international actorness, determining the EU's status as an actor within these theoretical boundaries has proven challenging (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:213). Within these state-centric approaches, the EU as a *sui generis* political entity being neither a state nor an intergovernmental organization but containing elements of both, has proven an uneasy fit. In state-centric analyses, a narrow overemphasis

on the ‘high politics’ of traditional foreign policy – involving notions of statehood, ‘traditional’ diplomacy and hard power projection – have frequently led to an underestimation of the EU’s true international impact (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:12). This has prompted the development of new conceptual frameworks and approaches designed to better encapsulate the EU’s impact and character as an actor in international affairs (Pieper et al. 2011:228).

One such framework is the so-called ‘actorness approach’. Initially developed by Gunnar Sjöstedt in 1977 as the ‘actor capacity’ concept, this approach has since become central to many analyses seeking to capture or conceptualize the EU’s international role(s) (Pieper et al. 2011:228). In challenging the notion of statehood as the prime determinator of international actorness, this approach relates strongly to more pluralistic and/or critical tendencies in international relations scholarship of the last decades (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:16).

At its most basic, actorness refers to the **ability of an entity to act purposefully and independently**, both from its external environment and from its own ‘internal constituents’ (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:16). As actorness is exhibited within a ‘system’ of actors (e.g. the international system of states) it is an inherently relational concept, demanding purposeful action to be conducted in relation with other actors over time (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:17).

The actorness literature has given rise to two related but distinct strands or tendencies relating to the EU (Pieper et al. 2011:229). One, commonly exemplified by Jupille and Caporoso (1998), is focused around four dimensions – recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion – as outward empirical markers of actorness (Pieper et al. 2011:229). The other, commonly exemplified by Bretherton and Vogler (2006) emphasizes the procedural development of actorness in interaction with the external environment.

One commonality between these two tendencies is in how they approach the EU as an analytical object. The EU is here viewed as an evolving entity, straddling the line between a system of state actors and a conventional polity. Thus, the EU can potentially vary in its actorness across different times, policy areas and political spaces (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:214). As such, actorness approaches can enable us to examine the question of EU actorness within a specific policy area or political space – such as the Arctic, with the goal of gaining a more granular understanding of the EU within that context.

Jupille and Caporoso – recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion

To function as an international actor within a political space, the EU is first of all dependent on possessing *de jure* and *de facto* recognition as a legitimate participant from its counterparts (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:215). *De jure* recognition is formal in nature, and is primarily seen expressed through official representation or membership in relevant international bodies. In the Arctic, this can refer to both pan-Arctic and sub-regional governance arrangements such as the Arctic Council (AC) or the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), as well as relevant global-level institutions and agreements such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). *De facto* recognition is more practical in nature, expressed in the degree to which the EU's Arctic counterparts engage with it as a legitimate partner (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:216, Pieper et al. 2011:229).

Secondly, the EU must hold the *authority to act* in the Arctic (Pieper et al. 2011:229). As the EU is a creation of its member states, this is primarily a question of legal competence. In the Arctic, this is expressed by whether the EU has been conferred exclusive or shared competence in critical Arctic policy areas (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:216, Pieper et al. 2011:229).

Jupille and Caporoso's third criteria for actorness is *autonomy*. In order for the EU to be a useful object of analysis as an actor, it must to some degree be independent and distinct from its constituent parts, such as the member states. The EU must be seen to have an independent 'causal importance' – otherwise, it is the EU's constituent parts who are the actors, not the EU (Pieper et al. 2011:229).

Lastly, the EU must demonstrate a minimum of *cohesion in the formulation of policy* to function as an external actor within a given space (Pieper et al. 2011:229). This is in large part what separates *actorness* from mere *presence* – the EU's processes having external consequences does not itself mean that the EU is acting with volition or purpose (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:218). These consequences must in some respect be instrumentalized through the formulation of concrete policies, bringing them together as a whole rather than as scattered elements (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:219).

Cohesion itself is a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing consistency of goals, tactics and procedures as well as final policy output (Jupille and Caporoso 1998:219-220). While a sub-concept in this approach, the concept of coherence has been developed

extensively in the scholarly literature on EU external action, and will be discussed in the context of the EU's Arctic policy documents in chapter 6.

Jupille and Caporoso's actorness approach is highly useful in establishing empirical criteria for determining actorness. However, it is also largely predicated on internal factors (authority, autonomy, cohesion), with only a mild external component in the form of recognition. Furthermore, it only to a limited degree addresses the question of how actorness is constructed beyond internal processes of conferral from the member state level.

In this regard, Bretherton and Vogler's alternative approach provides a complementary and highly useful analytical framework for examining the development of EU actorness over time, which also emphasizes external factors to a larger degree. Thus, it is this approach that will form the primary analytical framework of this study.

Bretherton and Vogler – opportunity, presence, and capability

In contrast to Jupille and Caporoso's approach, which is in large part centred around determining empirical benchmarks of actorness, Bretherton and Vogler's approach is more process oriented. It is in other words not only a question of whether the EU at certain points or in certain policy areas possesses the characteristics of actorness, but also a question of how actorness is constructed over time (Bretherton and Vogler 2005:2).

Such a process-oriented approach is useful when applied to the European Union's Arctic endeavour. As a political project, the EU's Arctic endeavour is itself undergoing a process of construction. Thus, this approach is well-suited when analysing how the Arctic actorness of the EU has developed.

Theoretically, this approach cleaves closely to theories of social constructivism. Constructivist approaches are particularly notable through their bridging of structural and behavioural explanations of agency (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:21). As such, constructivism presents a middle ground in the 'agent/structure debate' on the causal importance of actor-level and system-level factors in determining political behaviours and outcomes. 'Agents' in this context refers to the units within a system, which populate and act within it. 'Structures' are the characteristics of the system, which themselves can enable or constrain agency. Within constructivist approaches, *agents* and *structures* are seen as mutually constitutive through the causal mechanism of social construction (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:22). Structures are not considered in purely material terms, but as

intersubjective, reflecting the ideas, expectations and knowledge shared between actors (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:21). This is not, as some have posited, a rejection of material conditions as causally significant, but rather an identification of the ideational processes which give these conditions meaning (Wendt 1994:390, via Bretherton and Vogler 2006:21). Structures, encompassing both material and ideational elements, are thus seen as significant in enabling and constraining the identity and interest formation, role development and policy formulation processes of actors (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:21).

At the same time, systemic structures are not inert, but dynamic. Structures are alternatively 'reproduced or transformed by practice' by the actors within them (Wendt 1994:389). To the extent that the actors within a system are knowledgeable about the structures that enable and constrain them, they can potentially attempt to change them (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:21).

Bretherton and Vogler's actorness concept encompasses three broad dimensions – *opportunity, presence and capability*. These dimensions form the primary analytical framework for this study, and will be discussed in order.

2.3 Opportunity

Opportunity denotes the external environment of ideas, actions and events that the EU must navigate and which provides the 'frames' for its role development (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:24). This dimension constitutes the structural component of actorness development. While outcomes are not structurally determined in full, factors in the external environment provide the 'action setting' wherein agency is exercised, and actorness is expressed. In other words, this element encompasses the 'opportunity structure' the EU must contend with, which presents distinct sets of possibilities and constraints for its development of an international role, such as in the Arctic.

At the 'opportunity' or structural level, actors can be differentiated by the degree to which they are 'strategically well placed' within the system. Structures, material and ideational, are *selective,* favouring certain strategies and actor characteristics over others (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:21). Within the Arctic regional system, for example, we will see how notions of statehood, sovereignty and territoriality have become central to ideas of Arctic legitimacy and how these are reflected in the region's political structures.

Opportunity structures form the context and frame within which the EU must define and develop its role, affecting the EU's access and legitimacy within a political space. As they

significantly contribute to defining the terms and conditions of the EU's engagement, the opportunities and constraints presented by the Arctic political space will form the first independent variable of this study, being the focus of chapter 4.

2.4 Presence

The second dimension of Bretherton and Vogler's actorness approach is *presence*. It denotes the ability of an actor such as the EU to exert influence and shape processes and outcomes externally 'by virtue of its existence' (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:24). Presence is a direct consequence of the EU's material existence, and is distinct from concerted action (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:27). It encompasses elements such as interdependence with other actors, as well as the external effects of the EU's internal policies, priorities and processes (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:24). These 'externalities' can by themselves influence other actors and structures, and thus have causal significance. However, they are frequently also unanticipated, imprecise, or unintended. As such, presence is by itself not enough to constitute actorness, though it is a key enabling factor.

Presence is an expression of EU structural power to influence its external environment through its own legal, political and economic 'footprint' (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:24, 28). As such, the sub-concept of presence goes beyond the purely physical to also include other dimensions. The EU's presence within a political space encompasses *inter alia* the EU's competences (conferred by member states), legal reach (expanded through the accession of new members and legally binding agreements with third countries), institutional representation, and economic and ecological impact (Raspotnik 2018:65). A key aspect in this regard is the EU's significance as an economic and financial actor, with the economic importance of the Single Market being a particularly notable factor (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:28). By the same token, the EU's stature as a regulatory power is significant, with the impact of EU regulations frequently resonating far beyond the Union's borders (Damro 2012:686). In the case of the Arctic, the EU's presence is further enhanced by its significant funding role in regional development, cross-border cooperation and scientific research.

Presence is significant to EU actorness as a source of power, capacities and linkages that can be capitalized to provide tools and leverages in external action (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:29). Within a political space such as the Arctic, presence provides the regional connections necessary for it to act with a degree of legitimacy in the region (Raspotnik

2018:65). As such, it is a key enabler for EU role development, and will serve as the second independent variable of this study and will be discussed in depth in chapter 5.

2.5 Capability

While opportunity is largely external in nature, and presence something in between, capability is the most strongly internal dimension of Bretherton and Vogler's actorness concept. Capability denotes the ability of an actor like the EU to capitalize meaningfully on opportunity and presence through the formulation and coordination of policy actions (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:29). Like the dimensions of opportunity and presence, capability is also a multifaceted sub-concept. Those of highest relevance for this analysis is *the ability to identify priorities and formulate policies,* and *the ability to utilize policy instruments* (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:30).

The former denotes the ability of the EU to formulate policies that recognize viable opportunities, and that furthermore are *consistent* and *coherent.* Bretherton and Vogler use these terms to mean on the one hand a 'degree of congruence between the external policies of the Member States and of the EU' (consistency), and on the other a level of 'internal coordination of EU policies' (coherence) (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:30). As such, these terms relate closely to the dimensions of policy coherence that have arisen in the later scholarly literature on EU external action as *vertical* and *horizontal* coherence, with the former denoting consistency and synergy between the EU and its Member States, and the latter between (and within) EU policies (Gebhard 2017:122). Thus, to avoid confusion, it is these terms that will be used when discussing consistence and coherence in the EU's Arctic policy documents.

The *availability and utilization of policy instruments* refers to the ability of the EU to leverage its capacities in service of its external policy objectives (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:33). This encompasses traditional foreign policy instruments such as diplomacy and economic sanctions, but also goes further. It also denotes the ability of the EU to capitalize on and instrumentalize its wider presence within a political space to achieve its goals. As such, it includes *inter alia* the conscious use of EU market power and conditionality as levers to further the EU's interests and policy aims (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:34). In an Arctic context, the notion of capability should also include the instrumentalization of existing activities (such as regional or scientific funding schemes) to advance new priorities as they emerge.

In summary, capability represents a vitally important feature of actorness, in capitalizing on opportunity and presence and bringing these elements into a relationship with each other. Within a constructivist framework, we can also see capability as encompassing knowledge, experience and conceptions of identity among EU policymakers as expressed in policy. Thus, capability forms the final independent variable of this study – its impact observed through the analysis of the Joint Communications published between 2008 and 2021, in chapter 6.

2.6 Methodology and research design

Data gathering

After the initial formulation of the research objectives and topic, data gathering for this project began with an examination of the EU's Arctic policies, in the form of the (Joint) Communications adopted by the Commission and High Representative between 2008 and 2021, alongside scholarly assessments. This examination was further supplemented by information gathering regarding adjoining policies such as the 2008 Joint Paper on Climate Change and International Security, the Integrated Maritime Policy, the 2016 Global Strategy and the European Green Deal. The analysis at this stage was open and essentially exploratory in its approach to the material, though gradually centred towards changes over time with regards to objectives, scope, functional depth and narrative content as variances were observed. After the initial familiarization, additional context was gained through further information gathering, this time on dedicated Arctic policy documents from the Council and European Parliament. This was done both through secondary literature and by independent examination of the most relevant primary documents. At this point in the process, a timeline was constructed with the EC/HR Arctic policies serving as 'critical junctures' in the policy development process.

At this time, several relevant observations had been made. These related on the one hand to the scope and complexity of EU's Arctic agenda – encompassing governance, environmental and climate action, research, sustainable development and indigenous issues, as well as a broad and significant material component. As the EU's interests in the Arctic provide impetus for its regional engagement, these issue areas were then researched in depth, as well as their relationship to different areas of EU competence. Related to this, information was gathered to more comprehensively dimensionalize the EU's *de facto* impact in the Arctic outside the

scope of its dedicated policy development, encompassing factors such as ecological impact and the external dimension of internal policies.

Concurrently, significant variance between the adopted policies had at this point been established with regards to scope, depth, regional focus, as well as in the narratives they espouse on the state of the Arctic and the EU's place within it. Additionally, these processes of change were observed to be *non-linear* within the established timeline, following a shifting developmental trajectory. This variance could only partially be explained by the primarily internal developments examined at this stage, and as such leading to a greater examination of consequential developments and interactions in the external environment. Thus, a lengthy process of information gathering on the international and Arctic context of the EU's policy development – encompassing both wider developments in the Arctic political space, its structures, and the interactions with individual Arctic states – was initiated.

As the project now encompassed an essential interaction between agency and structures, a social constructivist approach was chosen as the theoretical framework developed. Consequently, Bretherton and Vogler's process-oriented actorness approach was well-suited for systematizing and providing meaning to the gathered data, informing the formulation of the final research question as well as its three independent variables through the dimensions of opportunity, presence, and capability.

With an established analytical framework, the gathered data could then be organized rationally in relation to the three independent variables. Importantly, a process of comprehensive reinterpretation and recontextualization of the empirical material and relevant documents was conducted with the conceptual framework as its analytical basis. This in turn allowed for the operationalization of variables and a further process of reinterpretation. This continual back-and-forth interpretive process between theory and material forms the backbone of this resulting study.

Operationalizing the analytical framework

To serve as useful analytical criteria and independent variables in this study, the three dimensions of Bretherton and Vogler's actorness approach have been operationalized in the following ways.

The EU's *opportunity* in the Arctic is seen as expressed through the structures of the Arctic regional system, in particular its institutional arrangements and governance frameworks. What is most analytically significant in this regard is how and to what extent these structures are *selective*. In other words, what strategies and actor characteristics they privilege over others. Within the context of EU policy development, the actions and contributions of the Arctic states are also considered within this opportunity framework. While the Arctic states are *agents*, and not *structures*, it is their position within the Arctic regional system that make their responses to the EU's Arctic engagement causally significant.

The EU's *presence* in the Arctic is seen as expressed through markers of regional impact and structural power. Presence is assessed through material relating to dimensions such as economic impact, legal powers, levels of association with Arctic states (including Arctic Member States) as well as the external dimensions of the EU's internal policies.

Finally, the EU's *capability* in Arctic policymaking is expressed through the ability of EU policymakers to establish concrete regional objectives and present coherent narratives on the Arctic and the EU's role within it. Additionally, capability is seen as expressed more broadly in the ability to develop comprehensive and meaningful regional policies that also contribute positively to actorness by explicitly incorporating elements of presence. The EU's adopted Arctic policies will be analysed with regards to scope, depth, emphasis and narrative content to produce an assessment of how this ability has developed over time. A simple but key assumption of this study is that policies which express concrete and ambitious goals are a more positive indicator of successful role development and actorness than policies that do not.

Research design

This study takes the form of a mixed method, single-case longitudinal case study of the development of the EU's development as an Arctic actor from the emergence of the Arctic on the global and European political agenda in 2007/2008 until the adoption of the most recent Arctic policy in 2021.

Case studies "[investigate] a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin 2018:15). As such, a case study is useful in exploring and improving our

understanding of the unique character of a distinct phenomenon – such as the development of the EU's actorness in the Arctic.

Longitudinal case studies investigate the same phenomenon within a specified span of time. As such, longitudinal studies overcome the most serious essential limitations of single-case studies, by providing multiple observations of the dependent variable at multiple points in time, or continually over the course of a developmental process (George and Bennett 2005:114). As discussed, the EU's policy towards the Arctic displays an analytically significant level of variance over time, and thus these multiple observations provide a useful basis for within-case comparisons. As an investigation of a developmental process, this study will compare the various iterations of the EU's Arctic continually in order to provide an assessment of the way the EU's engagement in the region has changed over time.

Document analysis and process tracing

While chapters 3, 4, and 5 are dedicated to establishing a contextual baseline for the development of the EU's Arctic policy, chapter 6 utilizes document analysis and process tracing in order to demonstrate and explain the developmental path of EU policy towards the Arctic between 2008 and 2021. Due to the information-intensive nature of these methods, this chapter is also the longest.

The documents to be analysed are the EU's four adopted Arctic communications. When analysing documents of this nature for research purposes, an overarching framework for analysis is highly important. In addition to their textual contents, it is important to consider their provenance, purpose, intended audience and the context under which they were adopted (George and Bennett 2005:100). Through the establishment of a strong contextual foundation and through comparative analysis between the communications, this study will also be able to establish what the documents *omits* between iterations, where it is analytically significant.

The documents are analysed sequentially, along a strong contextual timeline incorporating significant developments. As such, this analysis carries a process-tracing component. Process-tracing is a method of identifying causal chains and mechanisms between events and outcomes (George and Bennett 2005:108). The developmental path of the EU's Arctic policy is thus considered in the light of significant internal and external factors to provide analytical causal explanations for observed changes.

3: Why act? - The EU's Arctic interests

3.1 The 'why' of EU Arctic engagement – push and pull factors

To understand the development of the EU's Arctic actorness, we must first ask why the EU should seek to be an Arctic actor in the first place.

This analysis will assess the factors that have provided the impetus for the EU's Arctic engagement, broadly categorized as internal 'push' factors and external 'pull' factors. This first set of factors relates to the EU's institutional development as an external actor, which in itself can form an impetus for greater external engagement. The latter set of factors relates to the challenges and opportunities presented by the Arctic itself, which call for or serve to 'attract' the EU's engagement.

Push factors

At the same time as the Arctic became subject to increased global attention in 2007/2008, the EU was undergoing changes of its own. The Treaty of Lisbon, which was signed in 2007 and entered into force in 2009, contained several decisions of consequence for the EU's development as an external actor (Koivurova et al. 2011:363). While expanding EU competences to the area of energy policy, its most significant contribution of the Treaty in terms of external action was through institutional and procedural reforms (Koivurova et al. 2011:363). Firstly, the treaty amendments introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon established a self-contained legal personality for the EU, enabling it to conclude and negotiate international agreements as well as join international organisations and conventions (Publications Office of the European Union 2017)[1]. Additionally, the Treaty enhanced the role of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy[2], and introduced the EU's own diplomatic service in the form of the EEAS (European External Action Service) (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021a:258). These reforms aimed at strengthening the EU's external role, as

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[1] Prior to the Treaty of Lisbon, formal legal personality was reserved for the European Community (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:14).

[2] Prior to the Treaty of Lisbon, the position was known as the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, having been established by the Treaty of Amsterdam (Airoldi 2020:338, Bretherton and Vogler 2006:4).

well as enhancing coherence in EU external action by improving coordination between the Council and the Commission (Gebhard 2017:118, Raspotnik 2018:68).

Scholars have noted that these institutional innovations in themselves create an impetus for further external engagement. Institutions within a system such as the EU naturally have a vested interest in proving their relevance and expanding their remit and influence (Østhagen 2013:76). Thus, increased capacity for external action can be a driver of further foreign engagement, as institutions seek to 'prove their worth' by taking on new challenges.

Furthermore, the increased interest in Arctic affairs at the global level is also important for understanding the internal impetus for the EU's Arctic role development (Raspotnik 2018:29). With the Arctic becoming subject to increased global interest, a foreign policy actor of the stature the EU aspires to *would need* to have 'something to say' about developments in a region quite literally on its own doorstep. The increased salience of Arctic affairs on the global level can thus be said to have a 'centrifugal' effect, where increased international interest makes engagement with Arctic matters more relevant.

As such, the EU's Arctic engagement can thus be regarded not just as a means of maintaining and developing its regional interests, but also to strengthen its credibility as a foreign policy actor more generally (Østhagen 2013:86, Ringbom 2017:242).

Pull factors

In addition to these endogenous 'push' factors, the Arctic itself presents a wide array of opportunities and challenges relevant to EU interests and identity as a policy actor. Firstly, the Arctic is rich in natural resources. Secondly, the region is facing policy challenges and opportunities relating to climate change, environmental protection, sustainable development and the equitable inclusion of indigenous peoples, matters that are close to the EU's declared identity as a global environmental and human rights leader. Lastly, as a neighbouring region, the stability of the Arctic is of direct consequence for European security.

3.2 The EU's material interests in the Arctic

The effects of climate change have brought the resource potential of the Arctic to global attention. On the one hand, receding ice coverage is contributing to increasing the accessibility of Arctic natural resources such as hydrocarbons. On the other, climate change highlights the need to transition to greener energy sources such as renewables, increasing

demand for critical raw materials which can also be found in the Arctic (Chuffart et al. 2021:14).

The resource potential of the Arctic is at the intersection between EU environmental, industrial, developmental, trade and security interests (Biedermann 2020:176). The EU is the world's second-largest importer of raw materials, second only to China (Biedermann 2020:175). In this, the Arctic plays a role. The EU is today "the principal destination for goods and natural resources" from the region (Ringbom 2017:240). Thus, the considerable resource potentials of the Arctic region constitutes a powerful pull factor for EU Arctic engagement and provide a material component to the EU's regional ambitions.

Arctic resources present several commercial opportunities for EU economic actors, and could provide the EU with a greater future supply of strategic resources (Biedermann 2020:176). This could serve to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy, making the EU less reliant on world markets, or systemic rivals such as China and Russia, for resources critical to its advanced economy and continued technological progress.

However, while the resource potential of the Arctic is considerable, it is important to not overstate the ease at which they can be developed. Compared to other regions, hydrocarbon and mineral development in the Arctic is subject to higher thresholds for profitability, due to the harsh climate and long distances involved (Østhagen 2017:241). Likewise, the frequent lack of necessary infrastructure means that investments in new mineral and hydrocarbon projects are long-term, with decades between exploration and commercial production (Keil 2015:25). Additionally, the high environmental impact of mining and drilling activities means that these opportunities must by necessity be balanced against pressing environmental concerns.

Energy

In 2008, the US Geological Survey estimated that the Arctic contained roughly 13% of the world's undiscovered oil resources, and 30% of its natural gas (Keil 2015:22). At their time of publication, these estimates became the basis for increased global interest in the resource potential of the Arctic, strongly driven by high global energy prices at the time (Raspotnik 2018:66).

The EU is highly reliant on energy imports. Among the EU member states, only Denmark is a net energy exporter, and the EU imported more than 57% of its energy in 2020 (Eurostat

2021a). For the past decades, the EU has become major purchaser of petroleum resources from the Arctic, particularly gas, being connected to both Norway and Russia via pipelines. Despite ongoing decarbonization efforts, hydrocarbons still constitute 60% of the overall EU energy mix (Eurostat 2021b). As such, the Arctic has been seen as having strategic importance for the Union's future energy security (Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:381). With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, energy has been added to the EU portfolio of legal competences, which it shares with the member states as defined by TFEU Article 194 (Koivurova 2011:366, Chuffart et al. 2021:7). The EU's responsibilities in the energy field includes ensuring the security of energy supplies (TFEU, Art. 194).

Russia has been a key supplier of natural gas for the EU, accounting for 43% of EU imports in 2020 (Eurostat 2021a). However, Russia's recent attacks on Ukraine and the subsequent breakdown of relations with the West means that imports are now dropping rapidly (European Council 2022), with likely permanent consequences for the EU-Russian energy relationship.

Norway is also an important supplier of oil and gas for the EU, accounting for 12% and 25% of EU imports respectively. As an energy supplier, it has become more important as the EU has sought to divest from energy suppliers in more politically unstable regions such as the Middle East (Biedermann 2020:176). Given the acute strategic need for the EU to divest away from Russian energy, we can expect this importance to grow in the coming years. While most Norwegian hydrocarbon development still takes place outside of the Arctic, considerable prospects in the Barents Sea means that this region will play an important role in the future (Keil 2015:24).

Energy policy relates strongly to environmental and climate policy, especially as it regards to hydrocarbons. Within the EU, energy and environmental policy have been explicitly linked since 2008 (Chuffart et al. 2021:7). EU efforts to reduce its GHG emissions and transition to renewable energy are naturally of significant consequence for how Arctic hydrocarbon resources are developed, as EU demand for such resources are a major determinant for profitability (Stang 2016:24).

Particularly relevant in this context is the EU's climate agenda and regulatory instrument adopted in 2019, called The European Green Deal (EGD). The EGD links EU climate, energy and innovation policies with the goal of weaning the EU off its reliance on fossil fuels, and

transforming itself into a low-carbon sustainable green economy. Key EGD objectives include reducing the EU's total GHG emissions by 55% by 2030 and achieving effective climate neutrality by 2050 (Chuffart et al. 2021:8). If this transitionary process is successful, it will have a significant impact on the future of Arctic hydrocarbon development.

Mineral resources

The Arctic's abundance of mineral resources is also important for the EU in various ways. 90% of the European Union's domestic iron production takes place in the Arctic Barents region, in the north of Sweden and Finland (Biedermann 2020:176). Additionally, rare-earth minerals are found in Sweden and Finland, as well as in Greenland. Such resources are vital to many processes in the EU's high-tech industries, and critical to many of the technologies at the heart of the EU's transition towards renewable energy (European Commission 2008a:3).

The EU's Raw Materials Initiative outlines the Union's priority areas relating to non-energy raw materials (European Commission 2008a:5-12). These include utilizing raw materials diplomacy, trade and market policies in order to secure supply. Additionally, the EC maintains a list of 30 raw materials critical to the functioning and development of the EU economy (EC JRC 2020). Many of these resources – such as platinum and tantalum – can be found in Greenland in addition to rare earths (European Commission 2012).

China, a 'systemic rival' of the EU (Biedermann 2021:480), is the world's foremost supplier of rare earths and has used this advantageous position in the past to force concessions from other states (Biedermann 2021:471). Being dependent on Chinese imports for materials critical to its high-tech industries and climate objectives puts the EU at a disadvantage. As such, the development of such resources in the Arctic can be of considerable strategic as well as commercial value for the EU.

Living resources - fisheries

Fisheries are an important industry to many Arctic coastal communities, with extensive fishing being carried out both in territorial waters and exclusive economic zones of the Arctic states (Keil 2015:30). Arctic fisheries are some of the richest in the world, and are expected to increase in value in the coming years as fish stocks) migrate northward due to rising sea temperatures (Biedermann 2020:175). As the complex effects of climate change on fish stocks and ecosystems is only partially understood, however, these estimates are not certain (Keil 2015 30-31).

The EU holds interest in Arctic fisheries, both as the regulator of a large fishing fleet and as a major importer of catches from Arctic fisheries. The EU maintains the exclusive competence for fisheries conservation under the Common Fisheries Policy (Ringbom 2017:243), and regulates the EU's national fishing fleets (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021a:260). As such, it is an important international actor in fisheries management. Roughly 25% of the EU's total fishing fleet is involved in fishing outside of EU waters, which accounts for a similar proportion of the EU's total catches (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021a:260). The EC negotiates access for its fleet with third countries, either in the form of bilateral fishing agreements or through membership in Regional Management Fisheries Organisations (RFMOs). Thus, the CFP has a strong external dimension.

In the Arctic, the EU maintains bilateral fisheries agreements with Norway and Greenland (Biedermann 2020:175), as well as the near-Arctic Faroe Islands. Since 2008, the EC has not finalized any bilateral agreements with Iceland (DG MARE 2022). The EU has also been involved in the negotiation of multilateral agreements regulating Arctic fisheries – such as the precautionary agreement to prevent unregulated fishing in the high seas area in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO), which entered into force in 2021 (DG MARE 2021).

The Arctic activities of the EU fishing fleet(s) account for only 4% of Arctic catches (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021a:262), in turn only constituting 2% of the EU's overall catches (Rudloff 2012:25). However, for the relatively few EU commercial actors involved, these catches are naturally of high economic significance. Given pervasive problems of overcapacity within the EU's fishing fleet(s), the Commission is under pressure to deliver on the economic interests of these actors – occasionally at the expense of more overarching sustainability objectives (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021a:261).

Perhaps more importantly, the EU has significance for Arctic fisheries by virtue of its large internal market being a major destination for catches from Arctic fisheries. One third of all Arctic catches are exported to the EU (Hossain 2015:94). The EU's market and trade policies are therefore also highly relevant for the development and profitability of Arctic fisheries. In this regard, EU market regulations may be more relevant as a potential force for change in Arctic fisheries than the EU's own fisheries policy (Raspotnik 2018:79).

Questions over fish resources have at times been a source of tension in the EU's Arctic relations. An early example can be found in the case of Greenland, which withdrew from the

European Community following a 1982 referendum. This referendum was held following a series of disputes over fishing rights (Wegge 2012:13). More recently, the otherwise close EU-Norway relationship has been impacted by a series of jurisdictional disputes over Norway's contested Fisheries Protection Zone around Svalbard, such as in 2017 (Østhagen and Raspotnik 2019) and 2021 (McDonagh 2021).

Marine transport

As mentioned above, the climate crisis has presented new opportunities for marine transport in the Arctic. This is particularly the case along the Northern Sea Route (NSR), as sea ice loss has been markedly severe along the Russian Arctic coast (Keil 2015:26). The NSR presents a shorter route between Europe and East Asia, reducing shipping time (and fuel costs) by up to 40% (Biedermann 2020:176-177). If the NSR is sufficiently developed and consistently ice-free, it could present a remarkable opportunity for the world's merchant fleet – of which 20% (by tonnage) which sail under EU or EEA flags (Ringbom 2017:265).

Marine transport along Arctic waterways is trending upwards, having increased by 25% between 2013 and 2019 (Biedermann 2021:479-480). However, Arctic shipping is subject to risks not found along southerly routes (Ringbom 2017:247). The unpredictability of sea ice floes carries with it an increased risk of accidents (Ringbom 2017:248), which can also have catastrophic consequences for vulnerable Arctic ecosystems. Furthermore, limited accessibility, a sparse population and lacking land-based support infrastructure presents serious challenges for search and rescue activities, damage control and clean-up in the event of marine accidents (Ringbom 2017:248). Thus, while increased Arctic shipping presents significant commercial opportunities for a variety of economic actors, it also carries with it environmental risk.

In matters of marine transport, the EU has shared competence with the member states under TFEU Article 4(2) (Ringbom 2017:243). The EU has the competence to regulate shipping taking place under EU flags, and to regulate the use of EU ports (Koivurova et al. 2011:365). Due to serious risks of out-flagging, flag state regulation is not considered a very viable tool for the introduction of new shipping standards (Ringbom 2017:265). Port state regulation, on the other hand, is considered more promising. This also applies to Arctic shipping, as one third of ships utilizing the Arctic shipping routes begin or end their journey in an EU port (Ringbom 2017:266).

While the EU supports more stringent regulations on Arctic shipping, it is not itself a member of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN agency where global standards for marine transport are negotiated (Pieper et al. 2011:230). However, as it holds shared competence vis-à-vis its member states, the European Commission and the European Maritime Safety Agency have played an important role in coordinating the positions of member states ahead of IMO negotiations (Ringbom 2017:263). An Arctic-relevant example of this is in the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the Polar Code, which specifies environmental, safety and training requirements for vessels operating in the Arctic (Jokela 2015:36, Raspotnik 2018:165).

Another key interest for the EU related to Arctic marine transport has been in defending the principle of free navigation along the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage (NWP) (Pérez and Yaneva 2016:444). These waterways, which are becoming increasingly viable for shipping because of climate change, are both claimed as territorial waters by their respective states, Russia and Canada. In both cases, the EU's position is that these waterways are international straits (Pieper et al. 2011:230). These jurisdictional disputes have large commercial implications, both for the EU's large merchant fleet and for EU trade more generally. Should the waterways be deemed to be international waters, the governments of Russia and Canada would have the right to charge fees for passage, hurting EU trade interests (Pieper et al. 2011:230).

3.3 The EU's non-resource interests in the Arctic

While the EU like any political entity has material needs and interests, the EU's engagement in the Arctic is not explained by such factors alone. The EU is deeply invested in its identity as a value-based community (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:39-40), particularly on issues such as climate action and human rights.

Climate change and sustainable development

Climate change and environmental degradation constitute one of the most serious global crises of our age. This crisis is one that the EU, through a series of ambitious climate commitments and active participation in global climate negotiations, has taken on a leading global policy role in addressing (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:89, Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:381). Being deeply invested in its identity as a climate leader, it is not surprising that the EU has taken an interest in the Arctic, where the effects of climate change are at their most dramatic.

Among the regions of the world, the Arctic stands out as being particularly affected global climate change (Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:381). At present, the region is estimated to be warming at a rate twice that of global averages (Hossain 2015:92). Factors such as melting ice, permafrost thaw, unpredictable weather patterns and the migration of fish stocks are putting the Arctic's distinct environment, ecosystems and human populations under pressure. As the primary drivers of rising Arctic temperatures are GHG emissions from human activity at the global level, the contributing factors to Arctic warming are primarily found outside of the region.

The effects of dramatic and accelerating Arctic warming are being felt outside the region. Between 2003 and 2008, 40% of global sea level rise could be attributed to the deterioration of the Greenlandic ice sheet alone (Hossain 2015:94). Arctic warming contributes directly to accelerating warming at the global level, through summer wildfires, emissions of trapped methane from thawing permafrost, and decreased ice cover increasing the absorption of solar heat (Stang 2015:11). In Europe, the effects of global warming can be felt directly in the form of rising sea levels, flooding, coastal erosion, and disturbed weather patterns (Chuffart and Raspotnik 2019:158). This strong interlinkage between the Arctic and European environments provides a further impetus for EU involvement in Arctic climate change mitigation.

Environmental objectives have been part of the EU treaties since the 1987 Single European Act and have since been 'mainstreamed' into virtually all areas of EU law and external action (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:90, Chuffart et al. 2021:5). Today, environmental policy cuts across the breadth of EU competences – from trade, to agriculture, to fisheries, industry, energy, transport, and research and innovation (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:90). At the global level, the EU has actively been pursuing a leadership role in climate action since the 1990s (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:103). This can be seen expressed in the active role taken during global climate negotiations such as COP21 (Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:382-383), where the EU and the member states played a significant 'vanguard' role in shaping the resulting Paris Agreement. Under the current Multiannual Financial Framework (running from 2021 to 2027), 30% of the EU budget will be spent addressing the challenges of climate change (European Commission 2021).

Given the strong material component of EU Arctic interests, environmental concerns by necessity exist in tension with material or economic concerns. This 'economy-ecology'

dilemma is frequently bridged through the concept of *sustainable development*, of which the EU is a major promoter both regionally and globally (Chuffart et al. 2021:2). At its most basic, sustainable development implies a decoupling of economic development from environmental decline by the adoption of sustainable practices and new technology such as renewable energy. The sustainable development concept has been incorporated into primary EU law since the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and has likewise been mainstreamed into EU legislation and external action (Chuffart et al. 2021:6).

Human rights and indigenous issues

While the EU population includes only a small number of indigenous people, the EU has taken international norm building on indigenous rights and civic inclusion seriously. This can be seen as an extension of the EU's wider support for constitutional norms regarding democracy and human rights, including the rights of ethnic minorities (Hossain 2015:95).

As a political space, the Arctic has a significant indigenous component. The European Arctic is home to the only indigenous people in mainland Europe, the Sámi, who have traditionally lived in the north of Norway, north-west Russia as well as in the EU member states Finland and Sweden (Hossain 2015:90). Additionally, the population of Greenland, closely associated with the EU as an overseas country under the Kingdom of Denmark, is majority-Inuit. Combined with other indigenous groups in Russia, Canada and the United States, indigenous people comprise roughly 10% of the Arctic's total population. Indigenous organizations are represented in Arctic governance arrangements, particularly as permanent participants in the Arctic Council (see below). The EU has made the further inclusion and protection of indigenous peoples part of its Arctic policy agenda (Hossain 2015:90).

At the same time, the relationship between the EU and Arctic indigenous people have not been straightforwardly positive. This is particularly the case in Greenland and Canada, where the EU's Seal Product Regulation 1007/2009 banning the marketing and importation of seal products has done serious damage to traditional livelihoods. While the regulation nominally makes exceptions for indigenous subsistence hunting, the subsequent collapse in EU demand for such products nevertheless strongly affected them (Koivurova et al. 2011:368). Canada and Denmark both voiced protests against the ban on the grounds of indigenous interests (Biedermann 2020:175). By contrast, the EU's involvement in indigenous issues has been regarded more positively in the Barents Region, as a potential force for change in the relations between indigenous groups and Nordic national governments (Biedermann

2020:178). This is particularly relevant for Finland and Sweden, two EU member states that have not ratified the International Labour Organisation's Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (Biedermann 2020:171).

Security

Spatially and politically, the Arctic is on Europe's doorstep. As such, the EU has an obvious vested interest in the continued stability of the region as a matter of safety. When the Arctic re-emerged on the global political agenda in 2007/2008, much of the new interest in the region came steeped in securitized rhetoric. The combined 'shocks' of both record low sea ice coverage in the summer of 2007, and a perceived increase in Russian assertiveness in the region exemplified by its perceived 'claiming' of the North Pole, gave rise to a wide range of crisis narratives about the future of the region (Østhagen 2017:240). These 'scramble for the Arctic' narratives explicitly linked the geographical changes taking place in the region to an increased risk of inter-state competition and conflict, in a piece of classical geopolitical reasoning (Raspotnik 2018:4). As the physical geography of the Arctic changed, so would the conditions for inter-state relations. Thus, the Arctic 'meltdown' would become political as well as environmental.

While an age of Arctic resource conflicts has not yet materialized, these narratives were significant in attracting increased global attention to the region. They also contributed a considerable security component to Arctic discourses of the time. While it is beyond the scope of this study to determine empirically the degree to which the contemporary Arctic is predisposed to conflict, such narratives are nevertheless significant to the extent to which they can inform strategic action.

The European Commission and High Representative first outlined the EU's Arctic security concerns through the 2008 Joint Paper on Climate Change and International Security, one of the first EU policy documents to mention the Arctic to a considerable degree. Here, the presentation of the Arctic region aligns with broader conflict narratives, with climate change as a 'threat multiplier' that is "changing the geo-strategic dynamics of the region with potential consequences for international stability and European security interests" (European Commission and High Representative 2008:8). In 2016, Arctic security is again brought up within the EU's new Global Strategy, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe." This time, Arctic security is described using very different verbiage. This document highlights the EU's strategic interest in the Arctic '**remaining** a low-tension area' [emphasis

added] and in the continued functioning of its cooperative regional order (High Representative 2016:38-39). In contrast to the 2008 paper, this document highlights the value of the Arctic's 'well-functioning legal framework' and 'solid political and security cooperation' (High Representative 2016:39).

As the EU holds limited competences and jurisdiction in matters of 'hard' Arctic security, this document envisions a largely 'soft' security role for the EU in the Arctic – contributing to human security through climate action, sustainable development activities and fostering cooperation across borders and communities (HR 2016:39).

3.4 Summary: The complexity of EU Arctic interests

As we can see, the EU's regional interests in the Arctic region are multidimensional and complex, cutting across areas of EU competence and incorporating diverse and at times competing concerns. In addition to more normative, ideal, or 'altruistic' concerns the EU's regional interests also carry a broad and significant material component – from fish, to shipping, to energy and raw materials.

On the one hand, the range of EU interests in the Arctic provides strong positive impetus for the development of the EU's Arctic engagement. On the other, it also contributes to complexity in policy formulation and implementation. Firstly, it means that an EU policy towards the Arctic has a wider range of activities, interests and concerns it must incorporate to be comprehensive. Additionally, the various elements that must be incorporated can intersect and contradict one another (for example, economic and environmental concerns) leading to problems of coherence.

Secondly, an expansive Arctic agenda naturally introduces complexity in interaction with the external environment. Acting on a wider array of interests or taking a more expansive role entails more points of contact, and more points of potential friction with other Arctic stakeholders such as the Arctic states. Put simply, what the EU seeks to do with its Arctic actorness has significance for how it interacts with other actors in the Arctic political space and the wider opportunity structure more generally.

4: The Arctic Opportunity Structure

4.1 The meaning of opportunity

As discussed, *opportunity* encompasses the structural dimension of actorness, denoting the external environment of actions and ideas within which actorness is developed and exercised. Thus, to understand how and why the EU has developed as an Arctic actor, we need to possess some understanding of how the Arctic operates as a political space, and how it functions as an action setting or arena for the development of the EU's Arctic actorness. The structural conditions for EU role development in the Arctic are understood to be defined in part by the Arctic regional system by virtue of its selective nature – the strategies and agent characteristics that it selects for and against.

4.2 The contemporary Arctic – an institutional framework

The institutional framework that today governs much of the Arctic is important for understanding the development of the EU's Arctic role – as this system in large part determines the opportunity structure the EU has had to contend with when engaging with Arctic affairs.

The structures of the Arctic regional system have largely been established, in increments, since the end of the Cold War, at the initiative of the Arctic states. Since the end of the first decade of the 21st century, as the region again emerged onto the global political agenda, the region has entered a new era of change, driven by accelerating climate change and intensifying interest from outside actors. However, the Arctic has remained largely stable, with existing structures adapting to the presence of new stakeholders rather than being supplanted with new structures (Raspotnik 2018:44).

The Arctic regional system – from freeze to thaw

Contrary to some popular conceptions of the region as an uninhabited no-man's land, the Arctic is home to a deep and developed regional system. While its human population is very small, the governments of the Arctic states have taken considerable and increased interest in their northern areas over the past decades – driven by environmental and human concerns, as well as geostrategic interests.

The waning of East-West tensions in the late 1980s and 1990s altered the conditions for political cooperation in the Arctic. During the Cold War, the region was primarily conceived

of as a strategic and hyper-securitized ‘theatre of operations’ in the global stand-off between the superpowers. The dominance of hard security concerns during this time had largely foreclosed on any possibility for pan-Arctic region-building processes (Stang 2016:5). As the decades-long standoff between the superpowers subsided, however, new opportunities emerged. The adoption of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy by the Arctic states in 1991 is seen as the beginning of the Arctic’s institutional development (Raspotnik 2018:41), becoming the precursor to the Arctic Council.

In contrast to the governance arrangement in the Antarctic, the Arctic is not subject to a comprehensive treaty regime. Instead, the management of the Arctic largely falls upon a small number of sovereign states with a direct territorial stake in the region – the Arctic eight (Raspotnik 2018:36-7). Since the end of the Cold War, these states have engaged in a concerted process of region-building, establishing structures for intergovernmental and cross-border cooperation on Arctic issues of common interest (Tulupov and Tsarenko 2019:69). These structures allow the Arctic states to manage their interdependence, address trans-boundary challenges and promote regional stability. As global interest in the Arctic has increased, these structures have also allowed the Arctic states to maintain their status in the region by managing the influx of new stakeholders and integrating them on ‘their terms’.

Beyond the AC, the regional system of the contemporary Arctic is comprised in large part of smaller, overlapping and issue-specific structures (Young 2005:10). Having emerged at different times for different purposes, different Arctic institutions involve different constellations of actors, including from outside the region (Biedermann 2020:168). A commonality among Arctic governance structures is a tendency towards ‘soft law’ – their primary policy output being joint declarations or action plans rather than legally binding conventions (Young 2005:10). Another characteristic trait of Arctic governance structures is their lightweight organizational component – even the Arctic Council, recognized the most important regional organization in the Arctic, did not have a dedicated secretariat until 2013 (Arctic Council 2022a). These trends contribute to a strong intergovernmental slant in Arctic governance.

In addition to these ‘built-for-purpose’ Arctic structures, global arrangements such as UNCLOS also play an important role in the management of the Arctic. UNCLOS has been consistently favoured by the littoral Arctic states (the ‘Arctic Five’) as the preferred arrangement for settling questions of territorial jurisdiction in the Arctic.

4.3 Arctic structures

UNCLOS

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) stands as the foundation of the contemporary Arctic legal regime. Signed in 1982, the Convention is particularly notable for codifying the concept of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which gives sovereign rights to coastal states for "exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing living and non-living natural resources" up to 200 nautical miles from shore (Raspotnik 2018:37). Apart from the United States, all Arctic states are parties to UNCLOS. The US does however largely abide by the convention, and has as a signatory to the A5's Ilulissat Declaration supported it as the central component of the Arctic legal regime (Raspotnik 2018:36). The EU is also a party to the Convention, standing as the only non-state actor among its signatories.

The importance of UNCLOS in bringing about contemporary Arctic should not be understated. The innovations in maritime law that were encoded in the Convention was a major development in the "nationalization" of the Arctic – bringing vast swathes of previously international waters under national jurisdiction (Raspotnik 2018:37). As a result, the marine Arctic transformed from a mostly international to a mostly national space, with only four areas – among them the Central Arctic Ocean, being defined as "high seas" (Raspotnik 2018:38).

The Arctic Council

Within its own policy documents, the EU recognizes the AC as the most important or significant intergovernmental body in the Arctic (Hossain 2015:90). Founded in 1996, the Arctic Council (AC) is an intergovernmental forum for cooperation and coordination among the eight Arctic states (the A8) on issues of common interest in the Arctic. As a successor organization to AEPS, it has emerged as the central fixture of the post-Cold War Arctic regional system (Raspotnik 2018:41).

In addition to its eight member states, the AC includes six indigenous people's organizations as permanent participants[3]. It also counts a diverse group of official observers, including 13

[3] The indigenous people's organizations include: The Inuit Circumpolar Council, the Saami Council, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, the Aleut International Association, the Arctic Athabaskan Council and the Gwich'in Council International (Stang 2016:10).

non-Arctic states as well as several intergovernmental organizations and NGOs (Raspotnik 2018:41). As will be discussed below, the list of official observers does not include the EU, which has instead been granted an inferior (though functionally identical) 'observer-in-principle' status.

As an intergovernmental organization, the AC is relatively low-profile with regards to its legal powers. Its decisions mostly take the form of ministerial declarations, and the AC does not possess its own legal personality or ability to sanction individual members (Stang 2016:10). As such, it is a soft law institution, playing a guiding role and holding little power over its members (Dittmer et al 2011:208).

The Arctic Council explicitly does not deal with matters of military security (Raspotnik 2018:41, Ingimundarson 2014:193). As its membership includes Russia and five NATO members (with Sweden and Finland also joining the alliance), such matters are simply too sensitive. Similarly, sovereignty issues remain a 'red line' in discussions within the AC – Canada and Russia refuse to discuss the legal status of the NWP and NSR respectively, while Norway refuses to discuss its contested Fisheries Protection Zone around Svalbard (Ingimundarson 2014:193-194).

The Arctic Council has only negotiated two treaties within its considerable lifespan – the 2008 Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement and the 2013 Arctic Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response agreement (Stang 2016:11). As further evidence of its soft-law nature, the enforcement of these treaties is left to the members.

Despite its modest legal stature, the Arctic Council does play an important and generative role in Arctic affairs, particularly in the realms of agenda-setting and knowledge creation (Young 2005:10). Outside of ministerial meetings, much of the AC's activity takes place within its six working groups, which produce assessments and reports that inform the Council's decisions and bring attention to developments in the region (Young 2005:11). Working groups also constitute an important arena of participation for the AC observers (Arctic Council 2022b). Environmental protection and sustainable development form a

central component of the AC's activity, with all its six working groups fitting within a sustainable development paradigm[4].

By including non-state actors such as indigenous groups as permanent participants, the Arctic Council has been regarded as something of a hybrid entity – containing elements of both an intergovernmental organization and a regional forum (Hossain 2015:93). However, the AC remains firmly state-centric. While the permanent participants have a right to make themselves heard in the Council's decision-making processes, decisions remain "the exclusive right and responsibility of the eight Arctic states" (Ingimundarson 2014:191). Only states are true members of the Council, and decisions are made by consensus among them (Wilson 2016:56-57).

Due to the strong position of state actors within the AC, in combination with its lightweight organizational structure, the Arctic Council has been likened to a 'concert of powers' – a grouping of states eschewing multilateralism in favour of more traditional intergovernmental cooperation (Biedermann 2021:471). Ingimundarson contends that the privileged position of the A8 within the AC is an expression of them having 'carved out a hegemonic role based on sovereign rights and regional presence' in the Arctic (Ingimundarson 2014:184). With the increased global interest in the Arctic, a key concern within the Arctic Council has been the question of how to integrate new participants as observers without diluting the pre-eminent status of the A8 within the organization (Ingimundarson 2014:189).

Having had admitted no new observers since 2006, the AC revised its formal procedures in 2011. The new procedure for admitting observers highlights the exclusive and 'sovereignty-first' character of the Arctic governance system – admission is conditional on accepting the exclusive sovereign rights of the A8, and in accepting the current legal regime governing the Arctic Ocean (Wilson 2016:58).

The EU's application for Arctic Council observer status

The EU in many respects appears as a natural AC participant – three of the A8 are EU member states, and most of the issues the AC deals with relate to areas of community

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[4] The working groups of the AC are: Arctic Contaminants Action Programme (ACAP), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), Emergency Prevention (EP), Preparedness and Response (PR), Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) and Sustainable Development (SD) (Stang 2016:11).

competence (Aalto 2013:111). Attaining an official AC observer status has been a stated objective of successive EU Arctic policies since the beginning, and it has been regarded as the EU's 'main institutional goal' in the Arctic (Biedermann 2020:473). However, as of the time of writing the EU has still not been granted an official observer role.

During the initial stages, it was Canada that refused to accept the EU as an observer, due to the EU's ban on seal products. While the dispute with Canada was eventually resolved through World Trade Organization (WTO) mechanisms in 2014, the EU's application process is still on hold due to its deteriorating bilateral relationship with Russia following the latter's annexation of Crimea and the imposition of EU sanctions (Stang 2016:11, Hossain 2015:90). As the bilateral relationship has only degraded since then, this pattern has so far held. In lieu of formal acceptance, the EU was granted the ambiguous status of "observer in principle" in 2013 (Hossain 2015:90). While symbolically inferior, the AC's amended rules of procedure have rendered it functionally identical to formal observer status (Hossain 2015:100).

Notably, the actual role afforded to observers in the Arctic Council is not very substantial – it grants the right to attend meetings and to contribute to the working groups (Hossain 2015:91). It does not grant any additional legal rights for the EU in the Arctic beyond those already guaranteed by international law and is not a prerequisite for making decisions of consequence for the region. In some discussions, the EU's lack of observer status has been taken as an indicator that the A8 as a collective have rejected the EU. Given that the primary obstacle to EU observer status since 2014 has been Russia, it more accurately indicates a deteriorating bilateral relationship, the causes of which lie primarily outside the Arctic region. Instead, what really renders the Arctic Council an exclusive structure vis-à-vis the EU is the paramount status of the territorial Arctic states within the organization relative to those designated as Arctic outsiders.

The Arctic Five

A parallel structure that warrants discussion alongside the Arctic Council is the so-called 'Arctic Five', which has an even lighter and more exclusive institution. The A5 comprise the five littoral Arctic states – Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States, who hold sovereignty in the Arctic Ocean. Its most well-known output is the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, a forceful expression of commitment to the legal status quo in the region, and opposition to the establishment of any new treaty regime for the Arctic (Wilson 2016:57). The declaration expresses that the signatories hold a 'unique position' in the region by virtue

of their ‘sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction’ and they hold a ‘stewardship role’ in protecting the Arctic Ocean (A5 2008:1-2).

Due to the Ilulissat Declaration’s strong emphasis on Arctic sovereignty, it has been seen as an attempt to ‘consolidate’ an essentially exclusive regional order (Dittmer et al. 2011:210). As a document, it is clearly directed in part at an international audience, in particular non-regional actors with ideas on Arctic governance that run counter to their interests.

In circumventing the Arctic Council structure, the A5 have been subject to criticism for effectively excluding the other three members, and importantly also the indigenous groups represented in the AC (Ingimundarson 2014:189). The relationship between the A5 and the rest of the AC has been characterized as a ‘latent sub-hierarchy’ within the Arctic regional system, reflecting a power disparity between Arctic states with and without a marine Arctic territoriality (Ingumundarson 2014:185).

Other regional institutions – the BEAC and the ND

In addition to the aforementioned institutions of circumpolar Arctic relevance, a number of smaller, sub-regional institutions also populate the Arctic political space, particularly in the European Arctic.

In contrast to its subordinate status within the AC, the EU participates as an equal partner within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), where the European Commission is a founding member alongside the Nordic countries and Russia (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:41, Stang 2016:12). BEAC covers the so-called ‘Barents area’ – the northernmost parts of Scandinavia including the Russian border areas. Founded in 1993, its main fields of activity include regional economic development, energy and environmental cooperation, indigenous issues, and science and education (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:48). As such, its portfolio is more terrestrial in nature, dealing with issues ‘on land’ (Raspotnik 2018:43). While its geographical scope and land-based issue portfolio means that the BEAC’s remit is limited in a pan-Arctic context, it is a significant and successful arrangement for cross-border cooperation in the region (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:41). As a member of equal standing, the BEAC presents an avenue for the EU to engage more directly in matters of Arctic governance (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:49) – albeit within an organization that is more localized and issue-specific.

During the Finnish Council Presidency in 1999, the EU also established its own cooperation framework for the European north (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:50), the Northern Dimension (ND). The goal of the ND was to expand existing cross-border cooperation between the EU, Norway, Iceland and Russia (Pérez and Yaneva 2016:446). While at first largely centred on the EU-Russian bilateral relationship, and focused in large part on energy cooperation and environmental action, the ND underwent a renewal and 'overhaul' in 2006 – emerging as a common policy framework between the four members with an increased scope (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:50, Pérez and Yaneva 2016:446). While also serving as a forum for political dialogue, the primary activity of the ND is projects carried out through a series of issue-specific partnerships along issues such as transport and logistics, public health and environmental protection (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:52).

As an EU initiative, the ND is significant in allowing an avenue for the EU to bring its global priorities to bear in the north – such as in the areas of environmental protection, transport and sustainable development (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:53). It is however not a dedicated Arctic structure, as its geographical scope extends beyond the limits of the region, particularly to the Baltic Sea area. It is towards the Baltic area that the ND has been primarily focused, in part due to Russian wariness of deeper EU Arctic engagement (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:54). While Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the European Parliament have called for a greater focus on the Arctic within the ND (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:54, Airoldi 2020:337), development in this area has been slow. Additionally, the strained relationship with Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 has had a marked effect on the ND's activities, with ND projects being affected by EU sanctions against Russia (Bailes and Ólafsson 2017:56).

4.4 The Arctic regional system – a selective structure?

As previously discussed, the structures providing the 'action setting' for the exercise of agency and actorness should be analysed as being, in part, selective structures. Within a given regional system or policy context, actors are differentiated by the degree to which they are strategically placed according to the strategies and agent characteristics favoured by that structure.

As we can see, the region-building processes initiated by the Arctic states at the circumpolar level has given rise to a system which places a high emphasis on statehood, sovereignty and the rights of the Arctic states in determining the region's future. As such, the circumpolar

Arctic presents a less permissive opportunity structure for non-A8 actors to develop an independent role within the Arctic political space. Territoriality is strongly emphasized as a sign of Arctic legitimacy – an ‘exclusive geographical marker’ that separates insiders from outsiders (Dittmer et al. 2011:210). Within the AC, the A8 dominate, and participation by non-regional actors takes place on their terms. As the A8-A5 relationship also shows, Arctic territoriality furthermore can be seen as hierarchically tiered in the circumpolar Arctic – with the littoral Arctic states having certain additional entitlements in Arctic decision-making. With no Arctic coastline, and a landlocked Arctic territoriality ‘by proxy’ through the member states Sweden and Finland, the regional system of the circumpolar Arctic appears to ‘select against’ the EU in this respect.

While the selective structures of the circumpolar Arctic largely imply a secondary role for the EU, the same obstacles do not seem to apply within the sub-regional structures of the European Arctic. The sub-regional arrangements in the European Arctic and Barents Region present a more supportive opportunity structure for EU role-development than the circumpolar Arctic. This can be seen on the one hand as a result of their more technical and low-profile nature, but also a result of the EU operating ‘closer to home’, in an area where EU linkages are stronger and the reach of the Union’s legislation and policy instruments more considerable.

5: The EU’s Arctic Presence

5.1 The meaning of presence

Presence constitutes a significant enabling component of actorness. As stated in the introduction, it is the EU’s *presence* in the Arctic region that provides the necessary interlinkages for the EU to function as a legitimate or intuitive actor in the Arctic. As we will see, the EU’s Arctic presence is developed and multidimensional – with a modest territoriality contrasted by an extensive ecological, economic and legal impact that resonates beyond the EU’s borders. Looking beyond purely geographical notions of presence, the EU’s *functional* presence thus forms a key component in understanding the true extent of the EU’s impact and interlinkage with the region.

5.2 Territorial presence – the EU’s Arctic member states

The territorial dimension of the EU’s Arctic presence is often highlighted or emphasized when discussing the EU’s Arctic credentials. Discussions of the EU’s Arctic presence frequently begin, and often end, with reference to the EU’s modest Arctic territoriality, particularly its lack of an Arctic shoreline (Koivurova et al. 2011:361). This emphasis belies the way ‘Arcticness’ and Arctic legitimacy has been constructed as a function of geography (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021b:1163). It shouldn’t be ignored, however, that the territorial limits of the Union serve as one of the fundamental constraints on the development of its Arctic role as a key determinant of its legal capacity and jurisdiction (Ringbom 2017:242).

In nominal terms, the EU acquired an Arctic territoriality as early as 1973 upon the accession of Denmark. As Greenland, an Arctic constituent country within the Kingdom of Denmark, had not yet been granted considerable autonomy, the accession of Denmark also brought it into the Community[5] (Raspotnik 2018:34). Greenland gained home rule in 1979, putting it in a position to determine its own membership. Due in large part to discomfort with the Community’s fisheries policy, Greenland held a referendum on EEC membership in 1982, formally leaving the Community in 1985 (Wegge 2012:13-14). Consequently, the EEC/EU was left without an Arctic territorial dimension until the mid-1990s.

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[5] By contrast, the near-Arctic Faroe Islands had been granted home rule as early as 1948, and has therefore never been a member of the EEC/EU.

The accession of Finland and Sweden to the Union again provided the now-EU with Arctic territoriality (Wegge 2012:14). However, the public rejection of EU membership in Norway meant that this territoriality would remain *terrestrial*, as neither Finland nor Sweden possessed a shoreline to the Arctic Ocean. The later failure of Iceland's accession process, which was started in 2010 and formally ended in 2015, has meant that this pattern has held until today (Raspotnik 2018:69).

The EU's territoriality is significant as it in large part determines its legal jurisdiction. Thus, the EU's Arctic legal capacity is at its strongest in the Arctic areas of Finland and Sweden. Here, the EU holds jurisdiction within its areas of competence, though it is subject to the principles of proportionality and subsidiarity in areas of shared competence (Raspotnik 2018:69). Politically, the EU's territoriality is also significant as it impacts the way the EU is seen as an Arctic actor by its counterparts. As notions of territoriality and sovereignty (and marine territoriality and sovereignty especially) form a strong component of the circumpolar Arctic's political-ideational landscape (see above), the EU's modest and landlocked territorial presence in the Arctic has negatively impacted the degree to which the EU has been regarded as a relevant or 'natural' actor in the region (Koivurova et al. 2011:361).

Additionally, the presence of Arctic states within the EU's membership is also politically significant. The three Arctic member states – Finland, Sweden and Denmark – are well-positioned to play a leading and proactive role in driving the EU's Arctic engagement forward. However, such a unified leadership role for the Arctic member states does not appear to have materialized. Finland appears the most consistent in advocating for extensive EU commitments in the Arctic (Airoldi 2020:342) and has put considerable political energy into the Northern Dimension during its Council Presidencies in 1999 and 2006 (Wegge 2012:14). Finland is also the most forward in advocating an extensive regulatory role for the EU in the Arctic, highlighting its role as a source of Arctic-relevant legislation (Stang 2016:9). Likewise, Sweden has played an important albeit less forward role in guiding EU role development in the Arctic – acting as a 'mediator' and strategist during the early development of the EU's Arctic policy (Wegge 2012:21). Sweden has though primarily focused its energy on the development of the EU's Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (Østhagen 2011:19) with its overall Arctic focus being more muted (Airoldi 2020:342, Raspotnik 2018:35).

One commonality between Finland and Sweden as Arctic states – beyond their lack of coastline, is the relatively late development of an Arctic identity within their national policies compared to states such as Canada, Russia or Norway (Raspotnik 2018:34-35). Finland and Sweden each adopted their first substantive Arctic policies in 2010 and 2011 respectively, several years after the first EU Arctic policy in 2008 (Fakhri 2017:207).

By contrast, Denmark has had to navigate a complicated double role as both an EU Member State and as a spokesperson for its non-EU constituent territories, especially Greenland. Despite being an EU member, Denmark has on several occasions been compelled by its special obligations to express scepticism or hostility to the idea of a large EU role in the Arctic (Biedermann 2020:169, Østhagen 2011:19). This is in large part due to a perceived lack of respect for Arctic communities and livelihoods on the part of the EU. Danish Arctic officials have expended significant political capital on disagreements with the Commission on behalf of Greenlandic interests, on matters such as the Seal Product Regulation 1007/2009 (Biedermann 2020:175). Additionally, as a member of the A5 Denmark has also been involved in positioning itself against a potential stewardship role for the EU in the Arctic, as expressed in the Ilulissat Declaration (Hossain 2015:90). As it stands, Denmark's complex 'inside-outside' role has precluded it from playing a leading role in EU Arctic policy development.

5.3 Beyond territorial presence – close association

In addition to its member states, the Union's close level of association with several Arctic third countries serves to enhance its legal reach and functional presence in the region. These include Iceland and Norway, who are closely tied with the EU through the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, and Greenland, who despite its non-membership in either the EU or EEA is associated with the EU as one of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs).

The establishment of the European Economic Area in 1994 brought the Arctic states of Iceland and Norway into the single market. The EEA agreement enhances the external dimension of EU law, with the EEA countries adopting most EU legislation relating to the single market (Koivurova et al. 2011:362). Thus, the agreement extends the Union's legal reach and regulatory power beyond its geographical borders, making it a significant legislator

for most of the European Arctic in areas such as energy, environmental policy, tourism and civil protection (Airoldi 2020:342, Koivurova 2011:362)[6].

It should be noted, however, that the Arctic EEA states have at times exercised discretion in implementing other Arctic-relevant EU legislation. The most notable example is the 2013 Directive on Safety of Offshore Oil and Gas Operations, which both Norway and Iceland have chosen not to apply (Biedermann 2021:474, Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:395).

The 'EEA dimension' of EU legal capacity in the Arctic is weaker than in areas under more direct EU jurisdiction, in large part due to exceptions in critical policy fields such as fisheries (Raspotnik 2018:69). Despite these limitations, the EEA is significant to EU actorness in expanding the EU's legal and regulatory reach further into the Arctic region.

Greenland is not a member of the EU/EEA and thus not subject to the EU's *acquis*. However, it is closely tied to the EU as an OCT, and further through one comprehensive and one fisheries partnership agreement (Raspotnik 2018:70). The EU is a major funder for Greenland, particularly in the fields of education and vocational training and sustainable development (Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:139, Stang 2016:9, 15). In the past financial period (2014-2020), the EU transferred €17.8 million per year for fishing rights and quotas, and an additional €217.8 million through the whole period as part of the partnership agreement (Raspotnik 2018:83). Thus, while the legal reach of the EU is weaker in Greenland than elsewhere in the European Arctic, it nevertheless constitutes an important presence as a major financial contributor.

5.4 The EU's economic presence in the Arctic

In many respects, the EU is an economic and trade power first and foremost (Bretherton and Vogler 2005:62). Its massive internal market and the significant economic benefits it can hold for external actors provides much of the foundation for the EU's external influence (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014:200), including in the Arctic.

By virtue of its proximity and large economy, the EU has a significant economic impact on the Arctic region, particularly the European Arctic. The single market covers much of the European Arctic, and the EU has considerable trade interdependencies with the Arctic states,

[6] The EEA Agreement does not apply to the Svalbard archipelago (Koivurova et al. 2011:362).

with the EU being a key trading partner for Norway, Iceland and Greenland[7] (Raspotnik and Stępień 2020:138).

As discussed in chapter 2 above, the EU is a significant stakeholder in a wide range of capital-intensive economic activities taking place in the Arctic, and EU demand for Arctic resources is a key factor in the profitability of many such economic activities (Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:139). Through its internal processes, the EU is thus at some level capable of affecting the structural conditions for economic activity in the Arctic by its own volition. This capacity to shape developments in its external environment through the dynamics of its internal market is central to ideas of the EU as a *market power* (Damro 2012:686). To the degree that the EU's Arctic market power can be instrumentalized, this can provide a potent 'lever' by which to realize its regional priorities. Wielding it effectively, however, depends heavily on the ability of EU decisionmakers to anticipate and account for the Arctic externalities of its internal policies (Stępień and Koivurova 2017:34-35).

Furthermore, given the previously discussed long-term nature of Arctic resource development investments, the economic or commercial component of the EU's Arctic presence also has significant potential to expand in the future (Raspotnik 2018:79). This includes *inter alia* trade from Norwegian hydrocarbon development in the Barents Sea and mineral development in Greenland, as discussed above.

5.5 The EU's ecological impact on the Arctic

Commensurate with its high level of economic activity and large population, the EU is also a major contributor to GHG emissions and pollution at the global level (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:89). As its closest major industrialized region, what happens in Europe casts a significant 'ecological shadow' in the Arctic. This encompasses both its contribution to the rising global temperatures which are having a marked effect in the region, and as a source of pollutants which pose a risk to the Arctic environment (Chuffart et al. 2021:9).

Today, the EU accounts for 8% of global GHG emissions (Chuffart et al. 2021:9-10). As such, it is still a significant contributor to global warming, despite its global share having declined in recent years (Raspotnik 2018:80). In 2010, the EU was estimated to emit a quarter

[7] Until 2022, this was also the case for Russia, though its invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent imposition of EU sanctions means this relationship is unlikely to resume in the foreseeable future (DG Trade 2022).

of the mercury, 59% of the black carbon, and 42% of the sulphur dioxide coming into the Arctic from the south (Raspotnik 2018:80, Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:138).

While this aspect of the EU's impact in the Arctic appears largely negative, it does contribute in some respects to the EU's presence in the region. Firstly, it means that the EU in many respects has a responsibility to mitigate the environmental and ecological changes in the Arctic it contributes to as a major economy. Most importantly, however, it means that EU actions to reduce its domestic emissions of GHGs and transboundary pollutants can have a profound effect on the Arctic's future (Chuffart and Raspotnik 2019:160). The EU's environmental and ecological 'footprint' in the region means that the EU's internal environmental policies, such as the European Green Deal, have a strong Arctic-facing external dimension that can be a positive force for change (Chuffart et al. 2021:16). In fact, given the severity of Arctic environmental changes and the EU's role in it, regulatory processes of an internal nature may in fact be more impactful for the Arctic than much of the EU's dedicated Arctic policies.

5.5 Investing in the Arctic – the EU as a funder of Arctic activity

Another significant component of the EU's presence in the Arctic is the EU's financial role as a funder of Arctic scientific research, regional development and cross-border cooperation. This constitutes the EU's most significant direct contribution to the broader Arctic, and has been a significant channel through which the EU can construct its Arctic credibility (Stępień and Raspotnik 2016:16). While other aspects of the EU's Arctic engagement at times have been met with ambivalence or scepticism by some of its Arctic counterparts, it's funding activities are popular and relatively uncontroversial (Stępień and Raspotnik 2015:2).

The EU and its Member States are some of the most significant actors in Arctic research. Some of the most significant research institutions in Arctic science are in EU member states, including in non-Arctic states such as Germany and France (Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:137). The EU itself is the largest single financial contributor to Arctic scientific research. During the past two budget periods (2007-2013 and 2014-2020) the EU contributions to Arctic research and research infrastructure projects total around €400 million combined, including in associated third countries like Norway and Iceland (European Commission and High Representative 2021:12, Raspotnik 2018:80).

In an Arctic context, such research contributions are highly significant, as scientific knowledge is a core requirement for environmental policy (Bretherton and Vogler 2006:99). The changes happening in the Arctic due to global climate change are multifaceted, complex, and only partially understood. The EU's contributions thus enable greater monitoring and observation of Arctic environmental changes, and thus also to enhancing the basis for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation (Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:139).

In addition to scientific research, the EU is also an actor in Arctic regional development through its policies in the European Arctic. The northernmost regions of Sweden and Finland are beneficiaries of EU regional development funding – through the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund (Raspotnik 2018:81). In addition to strengthening economic development and competitiveness internally, cross-border cooperation has been an important objective of EU regional funding mechanisms since the 1990s. Consequently, the EU also administers a series of funding programmes for trans-boundary activity of Arctic relevance, such as the Interreg Northern Periphery Programme, which includes Greenland, Iceland, Norway and the Faroe Islands (Raspotnik 2018:82). This, in addition to the EU's already discussed contributions to Greenland also highlights its funding role in Arctic development beyond its borders.

The EU's role as a funder of Arctic research, regional development and cross-border cooperation forms a strong component of its Arctic presence. Selective support for certain activities provides a tool for shaping developments in the Arctic in line with EU priorities, for example by guiding the knowledge production of Arctic scientific communities conducive to its interests. Thus, this area of EU Arctic presence hews closely to notions of *integrative power*, denoting the ability to "create relationships and bring actors together", as well as shaping these interactions in line with one's own goals (Andreatta and Zambernardi 2017:75). Given that this potential is sufficiently instrumentalized, it can constitute a potent source of influence for the EU in the Arctic.

5.6 From presence, to actorness

The EU maintains a developed and multidimensional presence in the Arctic, and in the European Arctic especially. This presence encompasses territoriality, legal jurisdiction and reach, economic and environmental impacts, as well as broadly developed European mechanisms for investments and funding for Arctic research and regional development. The EU's broad and developed presence in the Arctic is a significant enabler of its actorness,

providing a wide range of tools and levers by which the EU can contribute to shaping a variety of developments in the Arctic. However, this complex presence, encompassing internal and external elements and criss-crossing issue areas and governance levels, must be sufficiently capitalized on in order to serve regional objectives. Thus, EU policymakers must therefore be acutely aware of the Arctic dimensions of its various capacities to instrumentalize them and incorporate them into a more cohesive Arctic engagement. This 'translation' of presence into actorness is a complex task and makes significant demands of EU policymakers.

6: Capitalizing on opportunity and presence? The evolution of the EU's Arctic Policy

6.1 The meaning of capability

The last dimension of Bretherton and Vogler's actorness concept – capability, refers to the ability by policy- and decisionmakers to capitalize on presence and opportunity by formalizing concrete objectives, and identifying and utilizing the tools at its disposal. As such, it constitutes the final 'piece of the puzzle' in translating opportunity and presence into actorness.

The formulation of a dedicated EU policy towards the Arctic plays an important ideational role in crafting or constructing the EU's Arctic identity and role. The EU being 'in' the Arctic – functionally or territorially, is not in itself enough for the EU to possess Arctic actorness if this presence is not acted on purposefully. Establishing a coherent 'superstructure' for the EU's Arctic engagement, through clear objectives and/or narratives, can serve to establish synergies and positive linkages between the various dimensions of the EU's Arctic presence and activity, by giving rise to a more cohesive role and overarching purpose that can guide further engagement.

Importantly, as established in chapter 4, the Arctic does not present the EU with a 'clean slate' for the development of its Arctic role, but rather a complex and developed regional system populated by strong and established actors with their own interests. As such, EU policymakers must be cognisant of the interests and concerns of their Arctic counterparts, and make tactical considerations regarding the formulation of their visions and objectives vis-à-vis the Arctic's political opportunity structure. As such, the dimensions of opportunity, presence and capability are essentially interlinked in the policymaking process.

6.2 Why communications?

While the Communications bear the name of the Commission, and later the European Commission and High Representative – the Arctic Communications constitute closest thing to an articulation of an official EU position on Arctic questions. The Communications incorporate and build on inputs from the European Parliament and the Council, issued in the form of EP resolutions and Council Conclusions. As such, these Communications can in part be regarded as a kind of 'complex output' of the EC-EP-Council 'institutional triangle'

(Pérez and Yaneva 2016:442), where policymakers in the Commission (and later the EEAS) collate, consider, and respond to signals from the other EU institutions, the member states and other stakeholders. This is a complex task, as EC/EEAS policymakers must balance the inputs and concerns expressed with their own interests – tempered by previous experiences and tactical considerations vis-à-vis its Arctic counterparts and the wider Arctic opportunity structure.

The position of the Arctic Communications within EU policy

Within the broader EU policy landscape, the Arctic policy is 'soft', being neither legally binding nor possessing a distinct post within the EU budget (Stępień and Raspotnik 2021:13). As will become clear in the following discussion, the EU's Arctic policy has at times been guided to a significant degree by 'stronger' and more overarching EU policies and global priorities. Thus, the EU Arctic policy is in an asymmetrical relationship with broader policies, such as the Integrated Marine Policy (IMP), the Global Strategy and the more recent European Green Deal (EGD). This subsidiary status is in some part a reflection of the Arctic's position within the wider EU policy agenda, as the attention and commitment shown towards Arctic matters has varied over time (Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:143).

6.3 Analytical criteria

In analysing the following policy documents, the following analytical criteria have been selected. First, the Arctic Communications will be analysed with regards to their policy context – internal and external developments and events that serve as crucial inputs in the policymaking process. This will help demonstrate how the policymakers consider and incorporate new inputs, reactions, and events, and thus help explain policy output. As such, it provides insights of 'action and inaction' that allows for an assessment of the EU's ability to identify, adapt to, and capitalize on changing opportunities in the region.

Secondly, the policy documents will be analysed with regards to their scope and policy content. What activities are included and omitted tell us something about the degree to which the policymakers consider them relevant to the EU's Arctic engagement and current interests. This also tells us the degree to which the adopted policies truly capture the extent of the EU's presence and impact in the region. Additionally, examining the scope of new actions proposed in each successive policy allows us to gauge the degree to which the EU is pursuing a proactive and substantial role in the region. An assumption of this study is that policies that are ambitious and substantial are a more positive indicator of capability than policies that are

not. Importantly, such changes observed over time allow us to assess the *developmental trajectory* of EU Arctic policy. For example, a reduction in scope and functional depth from one Communication to the next is assumed to be a negative indicator of EU role and actorness development.

Lastly, the policy documents will be analysed with regards to their emphasis and narrative content. Narrative fulfils an important function in the EU Arctic policy, articulating a specific conception of the Arctic and a vision of the EU's own role within it. As a complex policy area where direct policy links between disparate elements may not be possible, narrative can be thought of as important for establishing an overall rationale for the EU's Arctic engagement. Furthermore, the way in which different aspects of the EU's regional interests are emphasized within each policy is a useful gauge of its development as an Arctic actor, allowing us to see which issues are de-emphasized or avoided over time.

6.4 The 2008 Arctic Policy: "The European Union and the Arctic region"

Context

As discussed above, the EU had engaged to some extent in Arctic-relevant issues prior to the region's re-emergence on the global political agenda in 2007/2008, such as through the ND and BEAC. However, in lieu of overarching regional objectives to guide its engagement, the EU's involvement at this stage remained relatively fragmented and low-profile (Raspotnik 2018:87-91).

Two distinct but connected events in 2007 would serve to launch the Arctic back into the global and European political spotlight. The first event, in the summer of that year, involved a planting of a titanium flag by the Russian *Arktika* expedition on the seabed beneath the North Pole (Biedermann 2021:470). The second event was the rapid deterioration of the sea ice coverage in the Arctic Ocean, which reached the lowest extent ever recorded to that point that autumn (Raspotnik and Østhagen 2021b:1154). These two events interpreted together were taken as proof of an Arctic *climate-security* nexus, wherein the rapid and accelerating changes in the Arctic's physical geography was altering the conditions for inter-state relations and coexistence.

In October of 2007, the first substantive official mention of an EU Arctic policy came with the adoption of the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) and its associated action plan (Offerdal 2011:867). The IMP called for the adoption of a dedicated EU Arctic policy that could

encompass the linkage between climate change and security, as well as contribute to strengthening the region's legal framework (Pérez and Yaneva 2016:446). These concerns would later be reiterated in the aforementioned Joint Paper on Climate Change and International Security adopted in 2008.

Following meetings in 2007, the five Arctic littoral states (including EU member Denmark) in May of 2008 adopted the Ilulissat Declaration, clearly attempting to pre-empt calls for a new legal regime in the Arctic following the global proliferation of 'scramble for the Arctic' narratives. In the Declaration, the A5 expressed their commitment to the existing legal framework and opposition to a new governance framework (Offerdal 2011:868).

By contrast, the European Parliament would only a month before the adoption of the EC's first Arctic Communication adopt its own resolution on Arctic governance, on October 9th 2008. Urging rapid action in response to climate change, it called for the Commission to initiate "the opening of international treaty negotiations designed to lead to the adoption of an international treaty for the protection of the Arctic, having as its inspiration the Antarctic Treaty". A new treaty, as argued by the resolution, should cover the unclaimed and uninhabited areas of the Central Arctic Ocean "as a minimum" (European Parliament 2008:15). The resolution was passed with an overwhelming majority, with 597 votes in favour and 23 against (Wegge 2012:17).

As the resolution challenged their predominant governance role in the region, this naturally sparked strong reactions among the Arctic coastal states (Raspotnik 2018:98, Offerdal 2011:868). The level of reaction was at some level rooted in a confusion about the EP's policymaking role, with the Arctic states overestimating the legal significance of the resolution (Pérez and Yaneva 2016:446). Nevertheless, this contributed to scepticism towards the EC's upcoming Arctic Communication (Raspotnik 2018:99).

Among the non-EU Arctic states, Norway engaged strongly with the Commission leading up to the adoption of the Communication, to the point of exhaustion for some European officials (Offerdal 2011:866). Norwegian diplomatic efforts culminated in a meeting between Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and Commission President Barroso shortly before the adoption of the Communication. Afterwards, Barroso clarified that the position of the Commission was that a sufficient legal framework for the Arctic was already in place (Wegge 2012:17). A week later, on the 20th of November 2008, the EU's first

Communication on Arctic policy was formally adopted by the Commission (Pérez and Yaneva 2016:446).

Policy content

The 2008 Arctic Communication establishes the thematic structure which would become characteristic for all subsequent iterations of the policy. This '3+1 structure' encompasses three broad thematic pillars, corresponding to environmental protection, sustainability, and Arctic governance, with an additional indigenous component (European Commission 2008b:3). In this Communication, indigenous issues are included under the environmental protection pillar (European Commission 2008b:4) but will be moved in subsequent iterations. The Communication establishes three core objectives for the EU in the Arctic: 1) "protecting and preserving the Arctic in unison with its population", 2) "promoting sustainable use of resources", and 3) "contributing to enhanced Arctic multilateral governance" (European Commission 2008b:3). Within these objectives, a series of sub-objectives are proposed – encompassing *inter alia* research and monitoring, hydrocarbons, shipping and fisheries (European Commission 2008b:3-9).

Within a policy document strongly focused on environmental concerns, a marked interest in Arctic hydrocarbon development stands out as source of incoherence. In paradoxically advocating "the sustainable and environmentally friendly exploration, extraction and transportation of Arctic hydrocarbon resources", the policymakers' attempt to bridge the economy-environment divide is ultimately unconvincing (European Commission 2008b:7).

On the issue of Arctic governance, the Communication does not support or even acknowledge the EP's calls for treaty regime negotiations. However, it also says the EU will "assess the effectiveness of Arctic-relevant multilateral agreements to determine whether additional initiatives or measures are needed" (European Commission 2008b:11). Its position on existing Arctic governance arrangements is ambiguous, citing problems relating to "the fragmentation of the legal framework, the lack of effective instruments, the absence of an overall policy-setting process and gaps in participation, implementation and geographic scope" (European Commission 2008b:10). Given the pervasive 'sovereignty bias' within the Arctic regional system, this is controversial statement in itself, coming close to proposing new governance structures. Nevertheless, the Communication recognizes UNCLOS as the basis for further development of Arctic governance (European Commission 2008b:10), in line with the prevailing Arctic position.

The policy only vaguely addresses outstanding Arctic sovereignty issues. The EU and Norway's differing interpretations of the applicability of the Svalbard Treaty to the archipelago's maritime zones is referenced only in a footnote (European Commission 2008b:9). Likewise, questions of the legal status of the NSR and NWP are referenced indirectly through opposition to "discriminatory practices […] by any of the Arctic coastal states towards third countries' merchant ships" (European Commission 2008b:8). Thus, the Communication takes a relatively low-profile approach to sovereignty issues in the circumpolar Arctic, avoiding controversy.

Taken as a whole, the first EU Arctic policy adopts a broad approach to the region, proposing actions across a wide swathe of the EU's Arctic activity. While many of the proposals consist of 'encouraging', 'supporting', or 'engaging in dialogue' on specific developments, the Communication comes across as relatively novel and ambitious in terms of its content.

Emphasis and narrative content

An essential part of this document's narrative content is the establishment of a series of 'EU Arctic credentials' to construct regional legitimacy. The document highlights EU-Arctic linkages in the form of "a unique combination of history, geography, economy and scientific achievements" (European Commission 2008b:2). Attention is paid to the EU's functional presence in the region, referring to the external consequences of EU policies in areas such as "environment, climate change, energy, research, transport and fisheries" (European Commission 2008:2). The Communication further highlights the EU's contributions to Arctic research, as well as its global role in the promotion of climate action and sustainable development.

In line with the Joint Paper on Climate Change and Security, the 2008 Communication does emphasize the linkage of climate change and international security in the Arctic, with both the physical and political consequences of Arctic warming serving as a source of instability (European Commission 2008b:2-3). However, despite the security threats emanating from Arctic climate change being a key rhetorical 'framing device' for the policy, traditional security considerations do not play an important role in the Communication beyond that. Instead, the Communication emphasizes 'softer' security aspects such as environmental and human security, energy security and marine safety. Consequently, the Communication is only partially capable of providing a cohesive narrative framing for the EU's Arctic engagement, striking an awkward balance between conflict and cooperation narratives.

Beyond the specific mentions of hydrocarbons and marine transport, the Communication puts little emphasis on economic issues. Likewise, the EU's role in regional development in the European Arctic is not accentuated. Considering the importance of these roles, it is a notable omission. In this regard, the Communication displays a circumpolar, rather than European Arctic focus. It has a strong maritime dimension, and a corresponding low emphasis on more terrestrial issues, beyond references to the Sámi and to the existing of the Northern Dimension and BEAC. Thus, the Communication is largely *externally* focused.

Conclusion

The Communication is highly formative, in establishing the structure and format that would define the subsequent iterations of the Arctic policy. Gathering a wide range of different activities under 'one roof', it attempts to provide a thematic linkage between these disparate elements that can constitute the general thrust of the EU's Arctic engagement. The Communication does envision a proactive and multifaceted role for the EU in the region, with supporting activities for Arctic climate change mitigation, research, and sustainable development as its central deliverables.

Its emphasis on maritime circumpolar Arctic, at the expense of the European Arctic, is noteworthy. Given that the EU's presence and legal capacity is more developed in the European Arctic than elsewhere in the region, it should in many respects present itself as a natural staging ground for a deepening EU engagement. Instead, this vital sub-region is hardly mentioned, or distinguished from the broader Arctic. Consequently, the EU's functions as an economic or regional development actor are not presented as tools that can be used proactively. Therefore, the policy does not succeed in capturing the full extent of the EU's presence in the region. We can therefore say that the Communication reveals a certain *presence-capability* gap for the EU in the Arctic, with potent policy tools left on the table.

Compared to the European Parliament resolution that preceded it, the EU's first dedicated Arctic policy was ultimately far less controversial than what had been feared by the EU's Arctic counterparts. Nevertheless, the incendiary nature of that resolution in the eyes of the littoral Arctic states also led to the 2008 Communication being read in a negative light. The references to new structures, although far more neutral than what the EP had called for, would therefore still be intimidating to the Arctic states (Østhagen 2013:78, Raspotnik and Stephen 2012). In other words, while the Communication displays a great deal of adaption vis-à-vis the Arctic opportunity structure following intense interactions prior to its adoption,

it was still seen as insufficiently deferential to sovereignty concerns of Arctic states (Aalto 2013:118).

As it stands, the Communication does represent a relatively ambitious 'first step' in dedicated EU policymaking for the Arctic. It outlines clear objectives of environmental protection and Arctic cooperation, though the former is undercut to some degree by an additional focus on hydrocarbons. While taking on board the primary concerns of the preceding EP resolutions, it also clearly positions the Commission as a less radical policymaker for the Arctic, in implicitly rejecting the calls for a new treaty regime. While this on the one hand shows that the EU institutions are at this stage not fully aligned on Arctic affairs, it is ultimately a position more amenable to the Arctic's political opportunity structure.

6.5 The 2012 Arctic Policy: "Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region"

Context

The previous Arctic Communication had elicited responses from the other EU institutions. In a sign that the European Parliament were 'sticking to their guns' with regards to a new Arctic treaty regime, a motion for an EP on an International Treaty for the Protection of the Arctic had been tabled in April of 2009. However, both the Council and the Commission opposed the proposal, citing the A5's opposition, and the motion was postponed and later withdrawn (Raspotnik 2018:103). The EP's formal response would thus come more than a year later, with the Resolution on a Sustainable EU Policy for the High North in January of 2011.

In contrast to previous efforts, this Resolution aligns itself with the position of the Council and Commission, abandoning the idea of an Arctic Treaty and stating that the region 'should not be regarded as a legal vacuum' (Raspotnik 2018:106, European Parliament 2011). It thus represents a level of convergence between the EU institutions on the central thrust of EU Arctic policy. Being three times longer than the 2008 Resolution, the document takes an extremely broad approach to Arctic affairs, seeking to address every aspect of the EU's Arctic engagement (Raspotnik 2018:105). It therefore has a wider scope than the EC Communication, including a greater European Arctic component (European Parliament 2011:10). Declaring the EU as a legitimate stakeholder in the region on the basis of its climate policies, funding role, research activity and economic interests, it calls on the

Commission to continue the development of a 'united, coordinated EU policy on the Arctic region' (European Parliament 2011:1, 8).

Likewise, the Council had also issued its own response to the 2008 Communication under the auspices of the 2009 Swedish Council presidency. The Council's conclusions can in some respects be seen as a response to setbacks in EU Arctic engagement shortly following the adoption of the first Communication, such the deferral of its application for AC observer status (Wegge 2012:20).

While the 2009 deferral was in part a consequence of general disagreements about the role of observers within the AC, direct criticism was levelled at the EU over its proposed ban on seal products. The Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed publicly that he saw "no reason" for the EU to be admitted as a permanent observer, citing the EU's lacking "sensitivity" to the concerns and interests of Arctic countries and communities (Wegge 2012:20). In 2011, procedures for the admission of AC observers would be amended to include a requirement that applicants "respect the values, interests and traditions of Arctic indigenous peoples" (Raspotnik 2018:92), in reference to this dispute.

Canada challenged the legality of the ban within the WTO, supported by Norway (Biedermann 2021:473). Denmark, an EU member state which had made considerable efforts to combat the ban internally, criticized the EU's neglect for "the laws, traditions, cultures and needs of Arctic societies" in its own updated Arctic strategy adopted in 2010 (Biedermann 2021:473). However, Denmark would formally support the EU's application to the AC (Raspotnik 2018:120).

In light of these controversies, the Council Conclusions on Arctic Issues adopted in December of 2009 appear to call for a degree of course-correction in EU Arctic policy development. Sweden, as both an EU member and Arctic state, took on a leading 'mediating' or 'strategizing' role in developing the document (Wegge 2012:20-21). While supporting the further development of a dedicated EU policy towards the Arctic, the Conclusions also directly reference the 'legitimate interests and rights' of the Arctic Member States (Raspotnik 2018:104). Thus, the document hews closely to a more conventionally Arctic-appropriate intergovernmental and 'sovereignty first' perspective, that is more synchronous with the prevailing Arctic opportunity structure than the 2008 Communication.

Other developments of consequence to the 2012 Communication's policy context include the publication of the first substantive official analysis of the EU's political and ecological footprint in the region, in the form of the Arctic Footprint and Policy Assessment in 2011 (Pérez and Yaneva 2016:445). Funded by the Directorate-General for Environment and carried out by four European research institutes, the project's final report was an important source of information about the EU's environmental and socio-economic impact in the Arctic region.

Additionally, Iceland had applied for EU membership in 2009, and was thus regarded as a candidate country during the formulation and adoption of the 2012 Communication. The prospect of Icelandic accession to EU membership would have considerable consequences for the form and trajectory of the EU's Arctic engagement. It represented the potential for a marked expansion of the EU's presence and jurisdiction in the Arctic and near-Arctic, not least by finally providing the EU with a shoreline to the Arctic Ocean (Raspotnik 2018:69). The EU had also opened a dialogue with Greenland on raw materials in 2011 within the broader EU-Greenland partnership framework, partly in response to increased Chinese interest in Greenlandic mineral development (Biedermann 2021:474).

The second Arctic Communication was adopted in July 2012. Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the drafting of the Arctic Communications became an interservice collaborative effort between the new European External Action Service and the Commission's Directorates-General, with DG MARE retaining its key role (Raspotnik 2018:108). Thus, this and subsequent Communications on Arctic policy are Joint Communications between the European Commission and High Representative.

Policy content

Titled "Developing a European Policy towards the Arctic region: progress since 2008 and next step", the 2012 Communication retain the three-pillar structure of its predecessor. However, while the three pillars of the 2008 Communication constituted the policy's three overarching objectives, the pillars of the 2012 iteration are more diffuse. Proposals for new policy actions in the Arctic are now organized under the vague headings of 'knowledge', 'responsibility' and 'engagement' – roughly corresponding to environmental research, sustainable development, and international cooperation and governance (European Commission and High Representative 2012:4). In contrast with the previous policy, the indigenous component of the policy is now organized under the governance pillar.

Also in contrast to the 2008 Communication, the 2012 Communication is remarkably retrospective for ostensibly being a still-developing policy. A third of the Communication's length is dedicated to recapping regional developments and EU contributions from 2008-2012 (European Commission and High Representative 2012:12-18).

The actions proposed are representative of most ongoing Arctic-relevant EU activities. These include combating climate change, funding and promoting sustainable economic development in the European Arctic, supporting the adaptation of sustainable practices in resource exploitation, supporting and including indigenous peoples and mainstreaming Arctic matters in its bilateral relations with the Arctic states (European Commission and High Representative 2012:11). However, excising clear overarching objectives in favour of vague thematic linkages means that the policy largely appears as a collation exercise of more or less connected activities.

Arctic-dedicated environmental and climate actions are in this Communication largely technical, through commitments to funding and technical support for research on Arctic climate change, energy and sustainability (European Commission and High Representative 2012:6-7). The Communication also references the proposed and highly Arctic-relevant Offshore Drilling Directive, as well as the EU-supported development of the Polar Code within the IMO as means to reduce the environmental risk of Arctic economic activity (European Commission and High Representative 2012:9). In line with developments vis-à-vis Greenland, the 2012 Communication also for the first time gives substantial mentions to non-energy raw material diplomacy (European Commission and High Representative 2012:9-10).

In lieu of clear objectives, however, it is a less proactive policy than the 2008 Communication. It has a more technical character, reading more as a collection of distinct and issue-specific activities rather than a series of actions in service of an overarching goal.

Emphasis and narrative content

Notably, the narrative presented by the 2012 Communication as to the state of the Arctic differs considerably from that of its predecessor. References to the climate-security nexus and Arctic conflict narratives are gone, with the region instead lauded as an "example of successful international co-operation". The EU's place within this structure is legitimized by reference to its global role in climate action, green innovation, and research. The EU is also

presented as a legitimate stakeholder by virtue of its economic interlinkages and the external effects of its internal policies (European Commission and High Representative 2008:3).

By contrast to the 2008 Communication's more ambiguous stance, the 2012 Communication wholly accepts the existing legal framework of the Arctic, referring to UNCLOS as the "key basis for the management of the Arctic ocean" (European Commission and High Representative 2008:11, 17). In lieu of rising interstate competition and changing 'geo-strategic dynamics', the Arctic is here presented as a peaceful and well-functioning region wherein the political role of the EU is facilitative and supportive rather than proactive or problem-solving. It is instead the EU's functional contributions, such as its funding mechanisms and expertise, that forms the basis for its constructive engagement. As a result, the overall momentum and urgency of this Communication's rhetoric is remarkably weaker than that of its predecessor. In shying away from identifying any serious political problems in the region that would necessitate EU engagement, the question of 'why the Arctic needs the EU' is essentially left open.

The 2012 Communication's approach is explicitly broader approach than the largely environment-focused 2008 Communication, with a stronger economic component. The policy explicitly highlights the EU's central role as a destination for Arctic goods, from fish to energy to raw materials (European Commission 2008b:9-10). The Communication also emphasises the EU's role as a funder of Arctic research and regional development in the European Arctic to a more considerable degree, providing extensive data on regional funding schemes (European Commission and High Representative 2008:4, 8, 14). As a result, the emphasis on the circumpolar versus the European Arctic in the previous Communication has become less asymmetrical. Thus, while the overall depth of the policy is lower, it reflects a greater awareness of the multi-dimensionality of the EU's Arctic presence.

As mentioned above, scant emphasis is put on security or sovereignty issues. This must be considered in relation to the controversies surrounding the 2008 Communication. In contrast to its predecessor, there is no mention of an Arctic 'multilateralism'. Instead, the term 'international cooperation' is used throughout. This can be regarded a 'softening' of the EU's Arctic verbiage to avoid being seen as a threat to the exclusive rights of the Arctic states, given the sceptical response to the 2008 Communication (Airoldi 2020:339). This can therefore be taken as an example of 'adaptation' to the Arctic opportunity structure, seeking to avoid resistance or controversy by playing by the established 'rules of the game' in the

Arctic. As mentioned however, this also impacts how much the Communication actually has to say about the Arctic.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the 2012 Communication is a marked moderation of the EU's position on Arctic affairs. Negative pushback from Arctic states, expressed *inter alia* in the EU's unsuccessful attempt to attain an observer role in the Arctic Council, has evidently prompted a reassessment of the EU's ambitions and regional role in a negative direction. In terms of depth, posture and ambition, this reassessment has clearly had a negative effect. The EU's overarching goals and organizing ideas for its engagement have been dialled back, and the controversial elements of its Arctic policy have been excised. As a result, it is relatively fragmented, and it struggles to establish a cohesive vision to connect the disparate elements of EU Arctic activity. What is left, in terms of the Communication's vision for an EU role in the Arctic, is thus less internally coherent, presenting instead a collection of smaller, low-profile, and issue-specific roles across the various dimensions of the Arctic issue complex.

While a more neutral, less assertive policy did prove more palatable to sceptical Arctic states, it did also leave the EU without much in the way of a clear strategy for further engagement (Østhagen 2013:80). It is therefore difficult to not read this Communication as something of a 'tactical retreat', ceding initiative to the EU's Arctic counterparts to fit more easily within the Arctic opportunity structure. This Communication can therefore be seen to indicate that the EU at this stage is becoming 'boxed in' in the Arctic, with its policy and role development being in part dictated by other actors. In terms of capability, while the Communication's broader approach to Arctic affairs expresses a greater awareness of the EU's *de facto* presence in the region, it also shows the EU becoming more reactive than proactive in setting its own regional objectives. Indicating an essentially non-linear developmental trajectory, it therefore speaks to the difficulty for the EU to form and construct a coherent or consistent role in the region during this time.

6.6 The 2016 Arctic Policy: "An Integrated European Union Policy for the Arctic"

Context

After some delay, the EU's third iteration of its Arctic policy was adopted in April of 2016 (Stępień and Raspotnik 2016:2). Titled "An Integrated European Union Policy for the

Arctic", this Communication was adopted at a time of rising strategic significance for the Arctic (Airoldi 2020:339). At the same time, however, the EU at this stage would have to deal with a series of pressing crises in the south and east, namely the aftermath of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the 2015 migrant crisis.

The previous iteration of the Arctic policy had by that point been subject to further inputs and responses from the other EU institutions. In March of 2014, the European Parliament had adopted its "Resolution on the EU Strategy for the Arctic". In keeping with its predecessor, the resolution contains an exhaustive list of virtually every aspect of EU Arctic activity (Raspotnik 2018:111). It stresses the need for the EU to build regional legitimacy in the European Arctic and beyond, through the 'active involvement' of local communities (European Parliament 2014:H). In this regard, it also expresses regret over the economic effects of the Seal Product Regulation for indigenous communities (European Parliament 2014:5). Its most notable element, however, is its call for a "united EU policy", "coherent strategy" and "concretised action plan" for the EU's further Arctic engagement, clearly demanding that EC/EEAS policymaking towards the Arctic should be made more concrete and ambitious (European Parliament 2014:2).

This sentiment is also reflected in the Conclusions on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic adopted by the Council in May of the same year (Raspotnik 2018:112). Concurring with the broad strokes of the Arctic communications thus far, the Council requested the adoption of a new, "**integrated and coherent** Arctic policy by December 2015" [emphasis added] (European Council 2014:15).

By this point, the EU's official application process to the Arctic Council had been firmly deadlocked. While Canada had served as the primary roadblock at the early stages, the bilateral strain over the seal product ban had by 2014 been largely mended, with the WTO dispute resolution panel reaching its decision in May of that year. This furthermore coincided with the finalization of an EU-Canada free trade agreement, which concluded its negotiations later that year. Thus, Canada withdrew its objections to EU observer status, with Russia taking over the role of blocking the EU's formal admission (Hossain 2015:99).

By this point, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the resulting imposition EU sanctions had collapsed much of the basis for a constructive EU-Russian bilateral relationship (Tulupov and Tsarenko 2019:76, Stang 2016:16). While Russia would remain a central energy supplier for

the EU until its further aggression against Ukraine in 2022, relations were highly strained. However, the Arctic did remain an area of 'selective engagement' with Russia for the EU (Airoldi 2020:340), allowing it to continue its activities within the ND and BEAC, as well as carry out its *ad hoc* observer role within the AC (Stang 2016:17).

Alongside rising geopolitical tensions, the Arctic had also begun to attract the attention of several Asian states. In 2013, while the EU's application was deferred, the AC admitted China, Japan, South Korea, India and Singapore as observers (Biedermann 2021:475). That year, Iceland also became the first European country to conclude a free trade agreement with China. The new Icelandic government also suspended its accession negotiations with the EU, before formally withdrawing its application in 2015 (Raspotnik 2018:69). Thus, the EU would remain territorially 'landlocked' in the Arctic for the foreseeable future.

In 2014, the EU adopted the Maritime Security Strategy, which also references the Arctic marine areas. This strategy underlines the Union's core maritime interests – the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and human and environmental security (Airoldi 2020:343). The strategy notably highlights the environmental risks associated with increased maritime traffic and resource exploitation in the Arctic.

Another important global development of EU-Arctic significance was the conclusion of the ambitious 2015 Paris Agreement during the Conference of the Parties (COP) 21 negotiations (Airoldi 2020:339). Here, the EU had taken a leading role in shaping the agreement, and committed to a 40% emission reduction relative to 1990 levels (Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:383). The delay in adopting the 2016 Communication has been attributed in part to the need to incorporate the objectives of the agreement into EU Arctic policy.

Policy content

Keeping to the established structure, the three pillars of the "An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic" are now entitled "Climate Change and Safeguarding the Arctic Environment", "Sustainable Development in and around the Arctic", and "International Cooperation on Arctic Issues" (European Commission and High Representative 2016:4). While not designated as overarching objectives as they were in 2008, the pillars are this time referred to as "priority areas" (Raspotnik 2018:114). As in the 2012 Communication, the primary indigenous component is here organized the third, governance-related pillar (European Commission and High Representative 2016:15). As such, the EU's overarching

priorities remain unchanged, though they are stated much more concretely than in the previous Communication. These three pillars are synthesized into a wordy but coherent mission statement:

> *"Building on previous initiatives, this Joint Communication sets out the case for an EU policy that focuses on advancing* ***international cooperation*** *in responding to the impacts of* ***climate change*** *on the Arctic's fragile environment, and on promoting and contributing to* ***sustainable development****, particularly in the European part of the Arctic"* (European Commission and High Representative 2016:2).

Despite the wishes of the EP, the policy does however not constitute much in the way of a strategy or "concretised action plan". As had by this point become customary, the policy content of the Communication consists largely of an extensive list of existing activities and relationships (such as research funding and cooperation, climate, biodiversity and environmental action) to be continued or reinforced. The Communication thus serves as a more effective tool for communicating the EU's *presence* than its *capability* to instrumentalize that presence and bring its influence to bear. Within this itemized list, some new activities have been included as Arctic-relevant. The EU here mentions for the first time the deployment of innovative and cold-climate technologies as well as investment and business development as important aspects of Arctic policy (European Commission and High Representative 2016:11).

The Communication gives sovereignty and security issues a wide berth, even excising the now customary references to freedom of navigation along Arctic shipping lanes. In addition, Arctic hydrocarbons are mentioned only briefly, with no actions relating to oil and gas development proposed except the promotion of high regulatory standards (European Commission and High Representative 2016:8). In contrast to the previous Communication, nonenergy raw materials are also not mentioned.

The policy's most significant future-oriented proposal is a temporary coordination platform for the EU's European Arctic funding programmes, the European Arctic Stakeholder Forum. The purpose of the forum is to 'bring together EU institutions, Member States, and regional and local authorities' to 'identify **key investment and research opportunities** for EU funds in the region'. In addition to stakeholders in the EU member states, the process is also open to stakeholders from Greenland, Iceland, and Norway (European Commission and High

Representative 2016:11). Despite its temporary nature, the Forum presents an opportunity to establish synergistic links within an important subset of EU activity in the European Arctic, enhancing internal coherence "on the ground". As such, it represents a boon to EU capability in the region.

Emphasis and narrative content

In terms of narrative, the 2016 Arctic policy does not introduce any major changes compared to its predecessor. Despite rising tensions with Russia, the Arctic is presented as a peaceful region owing to its stable cooperative structures (European Commission and High Representative 2016:13). Again, the legitimizing basis for a greater EU role in the region is its extensive functional contributions as a regulator and climate leader, and funder and facilitator of Arctic research and regional development rather than its ability to address any significant governance issues.

While not hugely significant in terms of policy or narrative content, the most notable aspect of the 2016 Arctic Policy is its changes in emphasis relative to earlier Communications. The first notable shift regards oil and gas, which had previously occupied an important if paradoxical place in the earlier Communications. As mentioned, the 2016 Arctic Policy barely mentions oil and gas development, which is an overall boost to the policy's sustainability and environmental profile. This must be seen in light of the preceding Paris Agreement. Additionally, the lack of emphasis on hydrocarbons has also been attributed in part to Iceland and Norway's rejection of the 2013 Offshore Drilling Directive (Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:396). A third factor, however, is the crash in global oil prices in the years leading up to the adoption of the 2016 Arctic Policy. Lower global commodity prices also go some way to explain the de-emphasis of raw material concerns, as increased global supply made the prospect of expensive and long-term mineral development on Greenland a less viable prospect (Biedermann 2021:484).

The most notable shift in emphasis in the 2016 Arctic Policy, however, regards the policy's increased regional focus towards the European Arctic. While the first Arctic Communication made scant mention of it, the European Arctic here stands as the focal point of EU funding programs, investments, economic interests, sustainability efforts and political activity (European Commission and High Representative 2016:9-11, 14). Correspondingly, the circumpolar Arctic which was the paramount focus of the first Arctic communication is relatively de-emphasized.

Several factors can account for this shift in regional focus. First, the political difficulties encountered by the EU in the circumpolar Arctic may have prompted a change in approach. 6 years of disagreements and debate regarding the EU's application to the AC and the EU's ban on seal products can have given rise a certain 'Arctic fatigue' among EU policymakers (Raspotnik 2018:116). While the 2012 Communication was largely an attempt to conform to the Arctic opportunity structure, its status within the AC still ended up being interminably deadlocked. Additionally, the abortive Icelandic accession process may also have contributed to lessening the immediate relevance of the circumpolar Arctic to the EU. Relatively speaking, a deepening focus on the European Arctic could be seen to offer a 'path of least resistance' – a more permissive opportunity structure for the further development of EU Arctic engagement. It is also by far the part of the Arctic where EU capacity and presence is the most developed.

Conclusion

As an expression of EU capability and actorness in the Arctic, the 2016 Arctic Policy is more notable for its emphasis than its content. A 'regional pivot' or consolidation towards the European Arctic is a more proactive adaptation of policy to the Arctic opportunity structure than what had been displayed previously. As such, the policy displays a greater cognisance of the structures it is operating within, focusing on the areas where EU action can be the most impactful and autonomous, namely the European Arctic, rather than becoming passive.

While a positive step relative to the 2012 Communication, the 2016 Arctic Policy does not fully deliver on the demands for an 'integrated' or fully coherent policy. The policy still takes the form of a list of activities. Rather than an expression of *one* EU actorness, it expresses a series of distinct roles, frequently of a supportive or technical nature, within specific issue areas. Changes in the EU's global priorities regarding the role of fossil fuels does mean that these roles contradict less than before. At the same time, however, it does not provide much in the way of a guiding narrative or concrete objectives to comprehensively guide EU engagement across the Arctic issue complex (Stępień and Raspotnik 2020:142). This serves as a sign that the EU's Arctic policy at this stage was still, almost a decade into its development, a work in progress.

5.7 The 2021 Arctic Policy: "A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic"

Context

Five years would pass between before the next iteration of the EU's Arctic policy was adopted, on the 13th of October 2021. In the intervening years, several developments of contextual consequence to the EU's Arctic engagement had taken place.

Between 2016 and 2021, the other parts of the EU's 'institutional triangle' had each made two rounds of pronouncements on EU Arctic Policy. The Council adopted its first Conclusions on the 2016 Arctic policy only two months after its adoption. This document largely affirms the general throughlines of the policy, though with an emphasis on close EU-Member State cooperation on Arctic challenges (Raspotnik 2018:117). A second pronouncement in 2019 came to similar conclusions, though it stresses the need for an timely update of the policy in response to rapid regional developments (European Council 2019:4-5).

The 2017 EP resolution on an Integrated European Policy for the Arctic reiterated the demands for a more 'integrated' EU policy towards the Arctic. Citing increased Russian militarization in the Arctic, the resolution stresses the need for the EU to assert its interests vis-à-vis Russia and contribute to the resolution of emerging security challenges (European Parliament 2017:26-30).

A further EP resolution on Arctic policy was adopted in October of 2021, shortly before the adoption of the 2021 Arctic policy. This resolution expresses further worries about the ongoing Russian militarization of the Arctic (European Parliament 2021:18, 35). It also identifies China as a systemic rival in the region, citing its increased Arctic activity and deepening cooperation with Russia (European Parliament 2021:20). Furthermore, the resolution states that the Arctic should play a 'central' strategic role in the EU's output and supply of critical minerals to reduce its dependence on China.

The contents of the EP resolutions reflect wider developments taking place in the Arctic during this period. Following its annexation of Crimea, Russia had significantly increased its military activity in the Arctic, refurbishing its bases on the Arctic coast and conducting increasingly extensive military exercises (Biedermann 2021:477, Åtland 2020:169). These

strategic developments were in part interpreted as a 'return' of Arctic inter-state security competition, increasing the region's perceived geopolitical significance.

In the years leading up to the adoption of the 2021 Policy, the EU had also been engaged in several fisheries disputes with Norway within the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone. These disputes, involving snow crab catches in 2017 and cod quotas in 2021, essentially relate to disagreements with Norway about the legal status of the maritime zones around the archipelago. With Norway arresting EU fishing vessels, and the EU in turn threatening Norway with sanctions, the tenor of these disputes had been bitter, straining an otherwise close bilateral relationship (Østhagen and Raspotnik 2019:199, Budalen et al. 2021).

Several other developments were also of consequence to the EU's Arctic engagement. Following a referendum in 2016, the United Kingdom left the EU in 2020. In doing so, it took with it parts of the EU's Arctic presence and capabilities, including its Arctic research institutions, merchant and fisheries fleets (Stępień and Raspotnik 2021:18). As such, 'Brexit' can be regarded as a notable setback for the EU's presence in the Arctic.

Another development, strongly reflected in the following 2021 Arctic Policy, was the EU's adoption of the European Green Deal in 2019. The EGD does not mention the Arctic, but it seeks to transform the EU's economy in ways that have significant implications for the EU's Arctic footprint. As legally binding commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050, the EGD could have a significant impact on the EU's contribution to global and Arctic warming (Chuffart et al. 2021:12). A successful transition to green and renewable energy will likewise affect EU demand for Arctic resources and help dictate the economic conditions for different extractive activities. Furthermore, the introduction and future expansion of measures such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism will incentivize Arctic exporters to address their own emissions, thus party externalizing the policy (Chuffart et al. 2021:8, 12-13).

A final notable development was the change of leadership within the Commission, with the election of Ursula van der Leyen, former defence minister of Germany, as Commission President in December of 2019 (Blockmans 2020). The vision of the van der Leyen Commission for a stronger and more geopolitical external role for the EU, is also reflected in the Arctic policy.

Policy content

The 2021 Arctic Policy in large part carries over the priority areas laid out in the previous iterations, though these are again designated as *objectives* rather than thematic areas. The three objectives are given as 1) "A region of peaceful cooperation in the new geopolitical setting", 2) "Making the Arctic more resilient to climate change and environmental degradation", and 3) "Stimulating an innovative green, blue and digital transition" (European Commission and High Representative 2021:2, 7, 11). As we can see, the order of priorities has shifted, with the policy's governance component now in front. Indigenous issues are now largely contained within the sustainable development pillar, in third place.

Issues omitted from previous iterations have now been reintroduced, contributing to the overall policy's overall scope. This includes sovereignty issues, hard security, and non-energy raw materials. The unresolved disagreements regarding Svalbard are now mentioned explicitly for the first time. The policy also announces that the EU will enhance its 'strategic foresight' on Arctic security risks in cooperation with NATO (European Commission and High Representative 2021:6).

The policy explicitly links its objectives with the those contained in the EGD (European Commission and High Representative 2021:1), which now constitutes the 'heart' of the EU's Arctic engagement. This integration with EGD objectives is reflected in a newfound focus on critical raw materials for green and renewable energy, with new actions announced such as the opening of an EC office in Nuuk (European Commission and High Representative 2021:4).

The boldest functional element of the policy by far is the proposal for a multilateral agreement to ban the extraction and importation of Arctic and near-Arctic hydrocarbon resources (European Commission and High Representative 2021:9-10). In stark contrast to previous policies, this policy thus calls for the EU to take a proactive role in shaping the resource geopolitics of the circumpolar Arctic. As such, the policy displays little of the 'sensitivity' or caution that characterized the 2012 and 2016 iterations.

Emphasis and narrative content

Another surprising element in the 2021 Arctic policy is its significant change in framing and rhetoric relative to previous policies, particularly relating to Arctic governance. Governance issues now lead the policy document, and Arctic challenges are framed in a starkly

geopolitical light. While 'hard' security challenges were addressed in previous policies in a roundabout way or not at all, they are here highly accentuated.

The policy warns of the risk of the Arctic becoming an area of "geopolitical competition", thus "harming [EU] interests" (European Commission and High Representative 2021:2). The climate-security nexus returns, with climate change having reached an "unprecedented crisis point" and serving as a contributor to regional political instability. Citing increased militarization of the Arctic, the policy also explicitly identifies Russia and its increased assertiveness as a security challenge (European Commission and High Representative 2021:3). China also appears on the EU's Arctic 'radar', with its increased interest in the region and its monopolistic position in critical minerals being noted (European Commission and High Representative 2021:9). The new narrative framing of the EU's interest in raw materials from the Arctic is highly urgent and competitive, stating that "[o]ther global players are already moving fast to secure supplies" (European Commission and High Representative 2021:10).

Likewise, the policy's new narrative on the EU's role in the Arctic is coached in geopolitical rhetoric. While the familiar references of functional contributions in research and regional development are present, the legitimizing basis for the EU's Arctic engagement in this policy is its stature as a 'geopolitical power', with 'strategic and day-to-day interests' in the region, which 'exerts a significant impact on the Arctic through its environmental footprint and demand for resources and products originating there' (European Commission and High Representative 2021:1). Stating that Arctic development 'is not driven by local political and economic forces only', the policymakers here lean heavily on the non-territorial dimensions of the EU's presence to demonstrate relevance and legitimacy (European Commission and High Representative 2021:2).

Aspects of the EU's Arctic presence are explicitly stated as instruments of EU influence the region. The EU's investment in Arctic research networks is a 'diplomatic tool', and regional development and cross-border funding programmes are instruments to 'steer developments taking place in the Arctic' (European Commission and High Representative 2021:4, 14). Rhetorically, it thus expresses a greater confidence and willingness to instrumentalize its own presence.

In terms of regional focus, the 2021 Arctic Policy again turns its attention to the circumpolar Arctic, which dominates the section on governance. By comparison, the European Arctic is largely discussed in relation to sustainable regional development and mineral extraction, being less emphasized than in the 2016 Policy.

Conclusion

In many respects, the 2021 Joint Communication appears to break many of the 'rules' established through the successive iterations of the EU's Arctic policy. Notions of avoiding controversy and deferring to the Arctic states in the most substantive questions of Arctic governance do not feature here to a considerable degree. As a matter of fact, the EC/EEAS have here produced a policy that in its tone and content is far more controversial than the supposedly incendiary 2008 iteration. As such it represents a marked shift in the developmental trajectory of the EU's Arctic policy, being assertive and ambitious rather than cautious and limited. As such, while its verbiage may prove too intimidating for the EU's Arctic partners, it does provide a 'shot in the arm' for an otherwise slow and muddled process of policy development.

The proposed hydrocarbon ban is especially bold, considering the economic impact this will have, including on close EU partners like Norway. While a sign that the EU could contest part of the Arctic status quo rather than being bound by it is a positive indicator of capability and actorness, the proposal does open for significant problems in horizontal and vertical coherence.

One week after the adoption of the 2021 Arctic policy, Commission President von der Leyen would in an unrelated speech to the European Parliament highlight the role of natural gas as a 'transitional' fuel (Stępień and Raspotnik 2021:10), indicating that even the Commission itself is not fully on board with this scheme. Furthermore, this action will have difficulty finding support in the short term among those EU Member States who still rely on natural gas for their energy needs, such as Germany. Others, such as Finland, have however already announced their support (Stępień and Raspotnik 2021:10).

Additionally, while the collapse in bilateral relations with Russia following its invasion of Ukraine has served to reduce the significance of Arctic hydrocarbons (which currently are mostly extracted in Russia) in the EU energy mix in the short term, it has also made Norway's role as an energy supplier more significant. Given that Norway is now pursuing

extensive gas development in the Barents Sea (Dobson and Trevisnaut 2018:391), it is unclear whether this proposal will have the necessary internal support to be followed up substantively.

Apart from Russia, the response to this proposal from the non-EU Arctic states has been diplomatic (Stępień and Raspotnik 2021:10). While Norway made considerable efforts to influence EU policymakers during the 2008 process, its response in 2021 was surprisingly understated. Norwegian cabinet ministers expressed confidence that they would be able to 'solve the problem' with a trip to Brussels (Holter and Melgård 2021).

In integrating its Arctic policy more closely to the objectives of a 'stronger' and more overarching policy such as the EGD, the policy presents a more cohesive and concrete Arctic mission statement than its predecessors. While still a diverse list of activities first and foremost, closer policy integration results in an overall more workable 'superstructure' for future EU engagement, providing objectives rather than priority areas or broad themes. With clearer objectives than 2012 and 2016, it also displays a greater cognisance of how elements of the EU's functional presence – such as its funding activities, could be instrumentalized. As such, the 2021 Communication appears as a surprising high point in EU policy development towards the Arctic, serving as a positive indicator of capability and actorness.

6.8 The EU's Arctic capability – from structured retreat to consolidation, to reaction

Taken as a whole, the development of a cohesive EU policy towards the Arctic has been slow, iterative, non-linear, and frequently conditioned by outside factors. Particularly in the first two Communications, the constraints imposed by the Arctic opportunity structure are apparent. This analysis assumes that the EU, as a developing global actor, would not reduce the depth and ambition of its Arctic agenda of its own volition. Thus, the largely negative changes observed between the first and second Communication are taken as indication that the terms of the EU's early Arctic policy development were in large part set by the Arctic states and the conditions of the Arctic regional system. The downward momentum observed from 2008 to 2012 was halted in 2016 by an adaptive refocusing towards the European Arctic, where the EU's capacities and presence are at their most developed and the conditions for EU agency are more amenable.

Concurrently, successive EU Arctic policies also display an incrementally increasing awareness of the tools available to the EU by virtue of its presence. From its low-point in 2012, the EU's Arctic policy development has been positively reinforced by the gradual inclusion of further dimensions of EU Arctic presence, narrowing the EU's *presence-capability* gap in the Arctic. From market power to funding mechanisms, this has established a wider range of potential influence vectors that can be used to further new regional objectives. Consequently, the EU's Arctic capability has increased compared to 2008-2012. However, a broadening functional scope within the EU's Arctic policy has also added to the complexity of developing a truly 'integrated' or fully coherent policy.

Additionally, a deeper level of (asymmetrical) cross-policy integration as displayed by the 2021 Arctic policy does represent a positive step in EU policymaking, easing the path towards an 'organizing idea' that can serve to guide further engagement and identify synergistic linkages between existing activities. To the degree this aids the formulation of regional objectives and the effective use of existing instruments it is a positive contributor to capability, and thus also to actorness. However, while EU Arctic policymakers have demonstrated an ability to 'download' elements of higher policy, mechanisms or procedures for 'uploading' Arctic considerations in the opposite direction do not appear to be in place.

The 2021 Arctic policy can be regarded as the most significant narrative 'leap' in the development of an EU policy towards the Arctic, with its new geopolitical focus radically reframing its circumpolar Arctic engagement. This shift cannot be adequately explained simply as a function of presence or opportunity. Shifts in the Arctic opportunity structure, nor in the EU's regional presence during the 2016-2021 period are sufficiently dramatic to prompt such a change. Instead, capability presents itself as the most causally significant in this instance, as EU policymakers draw on their accumulated knowledge and experience to contest its circumpolar 'Arctic deadlock' and deliver on the demands of the new, 'geopolitical' Commission. As such, if the 2016 Arctic policy constituted a 'consolidation' versus the 2012 Communication's 'adaptation' or 'retreat', the 2021 Arctic policy appears more as a 'reaction' – its policy and narrative content doing more to challenge the prevailing notions of the Arctic regional system that its predecessor policies had gone to considerable lengths to abide by.

7: Discussion and findings

7.1 Developing Arctic actorness – the case of the EU

Having examined the conditions for and development of the EU's role in the Arctic along the dimensions of opportunity, presence, and capability, what can we say about the EU's development and as an Arctic actor?

The EU has many compelling reasons to seek to be an Arctic actor. Its regional interests are significant, and its own aspirations as an external actor further call on it to develop a coherent role within its northern neighbourhood. A key enabling factor in its Arctic role development has been its significant and multidimensional regional presence, which is as its most pronounced in the European Arctic.

Despite this, the developmental process of EU actorness in the Arctic has been slow and incremental – an iterative process of connecting with the region and building an understanding of the Arctic political space. This process has its impetus in the EU's own development as an external actor, as well as in the Arctic's increased global significance since 2007/2008. Additionally, the wide range of EU strategic, normative and economic interests in the Arctic has been significant, contributing to an extensive regional agenda for the Union which has contributed to shaping its Arctic policymaking.

By the same token, the development of the EU's Arctic actorness has been enabled in large part by its developed and multidimensional regional presence – encompassing geography but also extensive functional and economic elements. This presence provides necessary interlinkages for the Union to be a legitimate Arctic stakeholder – and provides tools and leverages by which the EU can contribute to shaping Arctic developments within a wide range of issue areas. As such, it presents a significant enabling factor in the development of the EU's Arctic role.

The development of the EU's policy towards the Arctic has for the most part been positively affected by the greater inclusion of further dimensions of presence – such as in an increased focus on the European Arctic sub-region. This gradual incorporation has led to the EU's Arctic policy over time more accurately reflecting the true scope of the Union's impact and influence in the region and is the most consistently positive element of the policy

development process. This part of the developmental process has contributed to incrementally addressing the EU's presence-capability gap, and its knowledge-impact gap in the Arctic.

At the same time, the inclusion of new elements has contributed to the EU's Arctic policy becoming increasingly broad in its approach, further complicating the task of policymakers to bind the increasing number of activities and linkages into a larger whole that can be more than the sum of its parts.

Over time, the EU's Arctic policy has been positively reinforced by the closer integration of objectives from stronger and more overarching policies – as seen by the 2021 Arctic policy's explicit focus on the European Green Deal. Conversely, cross-referencing of the EU's Arctic policy within broader EU policies remains sparse, revealing an asymmetrical and relatively unidirectional process of horizontal policy integration. There is in other words room for development in this regard, as the EU's Arctic policy development has not yet demonstrated a significant capacity to inform wider EU policy, or to mainstream Arctic questions within EU policymaking processes. This limits the ability of the EU to rationally instrumentalize many of its considerable leverages in the region from the external dimension of its internal policies – constituting something of a 'bottleneck' in its potential as an Arctic actor.

The EU's developmental path as an Arctic actor has been considerably affected by its interactions with the Arctic political space – a regional system of established and motivated actors, with an institutional character that strongly reflects these actors' prevailing notions of Arctic legitimacy. Particularly with regards to the circumpolar Arctic, this opportunity structure is highly selective in favour of the territorially Arctic states. This presents the EU, which is dubiously territorially Arctic and certainly not a state, with disadvantages in defining and developing its own Arctic role. As such, the EU has been designated as an Arctic 'outsider' in the structures of the circumpolar Arctic such as the AC, and thus relegated to a secondary role. In addition, the privileged position of the Arctic states within the regional system renders their inputs and reactions causally significant to the developmental path of the EU's actorness.

Inputs and reactions from the non-EU Arctic states to the EU's forays into the region have been more or less constructive. Canada and Russia have at different times presented the EU with considerable roadblocks in its quest for legitimacy in circumpolar Arctic governance within the AC. Canada 'disciplined' the EU over its seal product ban, while Russia used its

privileged position in the Arctic against the EU following the deterioration of their bilateral relationship. Norway's contributions have been more constructive, offering (or insisting) a helping hand that nevertheless has sought to guide the development of the EU as an Arctic actor down a pathway that conform to its own interests. Some EU Arctic member states, such as Sweden during its Council presidency in 2009, have taken on a 'mediating' role between the EU and the Arctic opportunity structure, contributing an overall 'adaptive' approach following the initial controversies after the 2008 Communication.

Following these interactions with the Arctic political space, the development of the EU's Arctic actorness noticeably shifted its developmental trajectory. This can be seen expressed in the 2012 EU Arctic policy, a Communication that to a greater degree conforms to the prevailing ideas of the Arctic opportunity structure, at the expense of having much to add. The overall degradation of overarching purpose between 2008 and 2012 is significant. As an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to gain greater Arctic legitimacy by conforming to the prevailing notions of the Arctic regional system, the 2012 Arctic policy is relatively unusable as a guide for further EU engagement in the Arctic. This speaks to the causal significance of the Arctic opportunity structure, as the primary explanatory factor for the non-linear development of the EU's Arctic policy and approach.

In this respect, we can say that the Arctic opportunity structure has had an overall *fragmentizing effect* on the EU's role in the Arctic. Its structures have effectively kept it at 'arm's reach' with regards to circumpolar Arctic governance, and the attempts by EU policymakers to adapt to its demands has had an overall negative effect on policy in terms of scope, depth and ambition. As a result, the EU's Arctic policy has for most of its existence been lacking in terms of an overarching 'superstructure' – a coherent narrative about Arctic challenges and a set of regional objectives which can guide and justify the EU's engagement and role in the Arctic. Instead, the EU Arctic policies adopted after 2008 and before 2021 largely reflect the established narratives of Arctic states at the time – that the Arctic is a peaceful and stable region without significant governance problems whose management should above all fall to the states within it. While this has been relatively commensurate with political reality, it is not a narrative that invites or necessitates a more cohesive role for the EU in the Arctic.

Consequently, the development of an EU Arctic role has been more heterogenous than cohesive. The EU is *inter alia* an environmental and climate actor, an economic and

commercial actor, a research and innovation actor and a regional development actor – but the attempts to integrate these elements into a larger whole through policy have so far only been partially successful. What is left is an EU actorness that is relatively fragmented – being dispersed within issue-specific niches as determined by presence and opportunity. For example, the EU's supportive functions as a funder of Arctic research, regional development and cross-border cooperation has been far more well-received than its overtures towards circumpolar Arctic governance, and as such this 'tranche' of the EU's regional actorness has had a greater chance to develop.

With the 2016 Arctic policy, the negative developmental trajectory observed from 2008 and 2012 is to some extent arrested through a noticeable consolidation towards the mainland European Arctic – a sub-region with a more permissive opportunity structure for EU role development. Here, the EU is to a larger extent an internal actor, and its economic and legal presence most pronounced.

However, the EU's 'regional pivot' towards the mainland European Arctic has proven temporary, with the 2021 Arctic policy 'returning' to addressing the perceived governance challenges of the circumpolar Arctic, even expressing a concrete aim of shaping the region's resource geopolitics. Only time will tell if the forceful 'mission statement' of the 2021 Arctic policy will develop into a practically relevant superstructure that can shift the EU's role from supportive and heterogenous to something more cohesive. On the one hand, this will rely on EU policy- and decisionmakers' ability to 'deliver the goods' on this new geopolitical approach, by setting clear objectives and further instrumentalizing the EU's presence and impact in the Arctic. On the other, it will depend further on the specific opportunities the EU will encounter in the Arctic political environment. As such, the continuing development of the EU's Arctic role will continue to stand at the intersection of presence, capability and opportunity.

7.2 Out of the tranches? Changing Arctic opportunity structures and the way forward

In this regard, the way forward will likely be shaped by the ongoing and profound changes in the Arctic regional system following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Since February of this year, Russia's illegal war on its neighbour has sparked a strong and multidimensional diplomatic and economic response from the Western powers, including the EU and all other Arctic states. While the cooperative structures of the Arctic system had to some extent been

successfully isolated from the political consequences of Russia's annexation of Crimea, this escalation has seemingly eroded the basis for any meaningful political cooperation with Russia, including in the Arctic.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the other members of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (including the EU) have issued a joint statement suspending all activities involving Russia (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022a), with an equivalent statement issued by the EU, Iceland and Norway regarding Northern Dimension activities (EEAS 2022).

Russia currently chairs the Arctic Council, and will do so until 2023 (Arctic Council 2021). As a result, the remaining 'A7' have announced that they will not send representatives to Russia to participate in meetings, and that their activities within the AC and its subsidiary bodies have been temporarily put on hold (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022b). While reaffirming their continued support for the institution, the now-A7 cite the need for time to discuss "necessary modalities" that can allow them to continue the Council's work.

Thus, the escalating severity of tensions between Russia and the West has given rise to a new and still developing situation which *will* entail some significant reconfiguration of the structures and procedures of the Arctic regional system. However, while it is too early to say what exactly these changes will be, the consequences of the new geopolitical situation will impact the conditions for further EU engagement and role development in the Arctic.

At the time of writing, the most plausible prediction that can be made is that the diplomatic relationship between Russia and the West (including all other Arctic states) will remain dismal for the foreseeable future. The basis for meaningful relations with the Russian Federation in its current form has been irreparably damaged and will likely not be re-established for decades. These new tensions will likely be significantly felt in the Arctic, and affect its development as a political space. Arguably, this situation makes the EU's stated new geopolitical approach to the Arctic more relevant today than when the policy was adopted last year.

What is clear is that Russia, which has been a longstanding obstacle to EU engagement at a higher political level is now being comprehensively marginalized in its Arctic international relations and within the structures of the Arctic regional system. This does have the potential to open gaps for deeper EU engagement. To the remaining Arctic states, the EU will be a

relatively much more acceptable partner in the Arctic going forward than Russia is. How acceptable exactly, however, remains to be seen.

As it is an ongoing development, it is too early to say exactly what new opportunities for EU engagement in the Arctic will arise due to the current crisis, and how EU policy- and decisionmakers will utilize their capability to act on them. Regardless of how this process plays itself out, we can reasonably predict that the EU will continue to considerably impact, and be impacted by, the various developments in Arctic for the foreseeable future.

8: Conclusion

8.1 How has the EU's Arctic actorness developed, and why has it changed?

The objective of this study was to examine and explain the development and change of the EU's role as an Arctic actor from 2008 until today. In doing so, it has utilized Bretherton and Vogler's process-oriented actorness approach, examining the developmental process along the dimensions of opportunity, presence, and opportunity.

The study has found that the role development of the European Union has faced serious constraints in its interaction with the circumpolar Arctic regional system – a system that significantly privileges the territorially Arctic states. The structures of this regional system, particularly in the circumpolar Arctic, have been seen as embodying prevailing notions of statehood, sovereignty, and territoriality as the key to Arctic legitimacy. This has been found to relate to the establishment of the contemporary Arctic institutional framework as a project 'by and for' the territorial Arctic states prior to the re-emergence of the Arctic on the global political agenda. These structures have remained largely stable as global interest in the Arctic has increased, with the Arctic states integrating new stakeholders on their terms.

Thus, the study contends that the EU has had to pursue its role in the region as a designated Arctic 'outsider', its status within the region being significantly shaped by the strictures of this essentially hierarchical system. Due to the strong positions of the territorial Arctic states within this structure, their reactions, counter-narratives and more or less constructive inputs to EU policy development has been found to have been causally significant in shaping and redirecting the developmental trajectory of the EU's Arctic policy and role. It has spurred an adaptive process in EU policymaking which has been overall fragmentizing to its development as an Arctic actor and affected the capability of EU policymakers to articulate coherent narratives and concrete objectives to support and guide its further development as an Arctic actor.

Thus, with the overall directionality and purpose of the EU's Arctic engagement being relatively diffuse, the development of the EU's Arctic actorness has been found to have been primarily concentrated within a set of distinct functional niches informed by presence and opportunity, resulting in a fragmented actorness that is more heterogenous than it is cohesive.

The successive iterations of the EU’s Arctic policy have expressed a diversity of responses to the Arctic opportunity structure. The 2012 Communication largely adapted to outside pressure by excising its controversial elements, significantly dialling back the EU’s stated regional ambitions – thus resembling something of a structured retreat. The 2016 Arctic policy shifted its focus towards the relatively more welcoming opportunity of the European Arctic sub-region, increasing its depth but de-emphasizing its circumpolar Arctic component. By contrast, the 2021 Arctic policy more significantly challenges the circumpolar Arctic opportunity structure – presenting its own counter-narrative within a more assertive, proactive, and overtly geopolitical approach. As not visibly conditioned by external factors or changes in the EU’s presence, this appears to be an internal development relating to a stronger EU policymaking *capability*.

Being more of a reaction than an adaption to the constraints of the Arctic opportunity structure, it presents a significant new development in EU Arctic policymaking at the declarative level. Time will tell the degree to which EU policy- and decisionmakers will be able to further translate this new approach into practical action, and what effect this may have on the further development of the EU’s Arctic role.

8.2 Suggestions for further research

As ongoing developments in the wake of Russia’s war on Ukraine are predicted to have wide-ranging but still unknown effects on the Arctic political space, the EU’s further development as an Arctic actor will continue to warrant scholarly examination in the years to come. How the ‘A7’ adapt their Arctic cooperation to the new geopolitical situation may alter the conditions for participation for like-minded and well-connected ‘outsiders’ such as the EU. There is therefore a significant need for the developments outlined in this study to be followed up as the situation progresses.

The EU’s own Arctic processes will also need to be watched with interest in the coming years. It is at this stage too early to ascertain the degree to which EU policy- and decisionmakers have been able to practically implement the new, ‘geopolitical’ approach outlined in the 2021 Communication beyond the level of vocabulary. While concrete in its aims, the non-linear developmental path demonstrated up to this point means that it is not yet certain. Thus, current and prospective scholars of the EU-Arctic interlinkage will have their work cut out for them in the years to come.

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9: Bibliography

9.1 Images

Cover image

Seguinot, J. (2021): Katabatic winds scrap the snow off Greenlandic outlet glaciers around Siorapaluk, 6 Mar. 2021. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Share Alike 2.0 Generic license. Available at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Arctic_sunrise_Sirapaluk_%2851049996311%29.jpg (Retrieved 18.11.2022)

Fig 1. Arctic Human Development Report Map

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Fig 2. Map of the European Arctic

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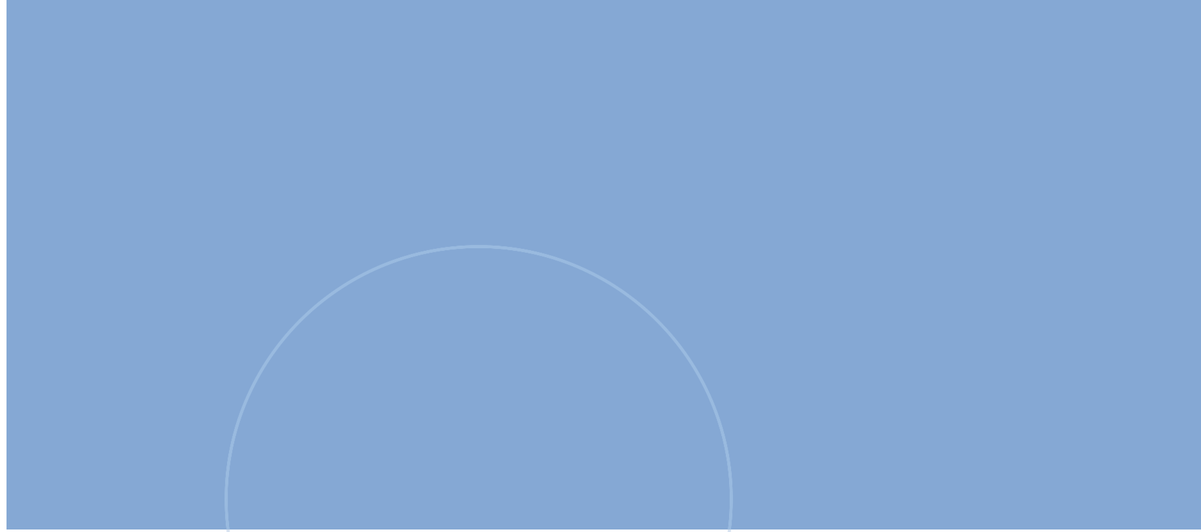
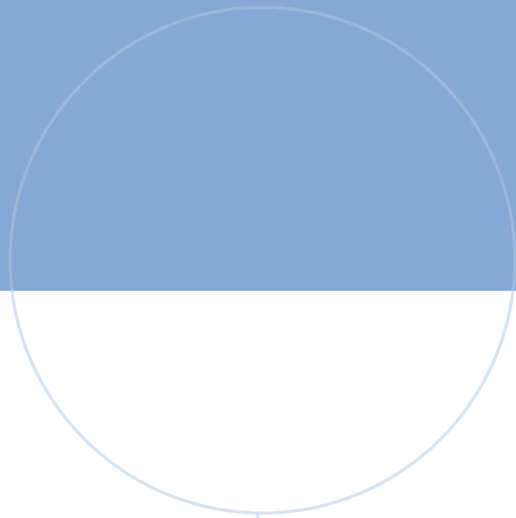
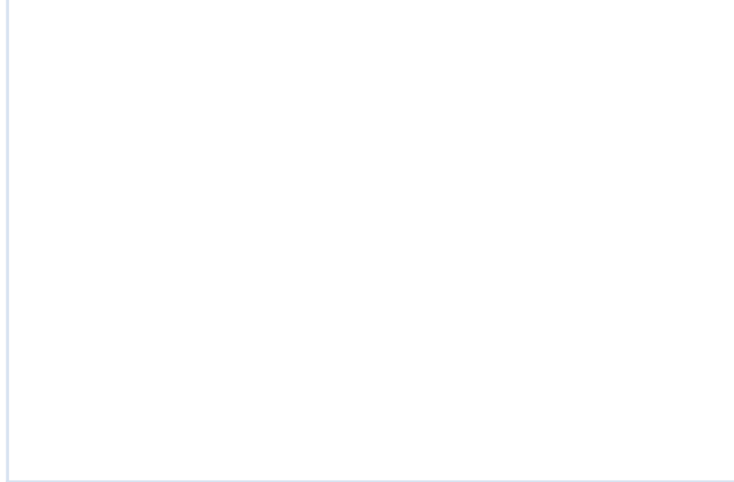

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