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High North scenarios and subnational realities: policies and practices in the Norwegian/Russian border zone*

© Peter HAUGSETH, Cand. Sci. (Pol.), Assistant Professor

E-mail: peter.haugseth@uit.no

UiT — The Arctic University of Norway, Kirkenes, Norway

Abstract. As the world was becoming more interdependent, with increased global awareness of the northernmost parts of the world, both the Norwegian and Russian governments showed more political commitment to and interest in new forms of region-building and development in the High North from 2006 and onwards. Today, more than ten years later, many regional changes are evident in the Norwegian-Russian border zone, as a consequence of expanded people-to-people contacts in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). In this peripheral border area between two national states, villages and cities have become more open, both sociologically and legally for increased cross border cooperation (CBC) and networking. In this article I will take stock of some of these borderland openings following on from the consequence of the two nations' rising levels of interest in the High North. It explores the ways in which (inter-)national policy-making and state-substate interactions ultimately altered centre-periphery dynamics. This article has based its approach to understanding the interplay of domestic and foreign policy instruments on the 'substate diplomacy' literature, which argues that increased state-substate interactions constitute an efficient instrument for extending cooperation beyond national state borders. The efficiency of regionally driven substate interactions is discussed from an empirical perspective. The present study analyses various High North development contexts and discourses (effective from 2008) in the Arctic borderland between Norway and Russia. The new political commitments presented in state-level official documents (the branding of the High North) envisioned a transference of new industrial-economic high tech scenarios from state to local level. These scenarios included new borderland visa regimes, co-existing with cross-border forums investments in improvements of roads, infrastructure, and transport rationalisations. The present article briefly assesses these policy rationales and their outcomes, revealing the region's contemporary geopolitical and economical potential, as well as local and regional realities. The findings show that substate governments and stakeholders are able to operate in demanding trans-border contexts, contribute to ongoing contemporary CBC discussions, and complement national and state-level efforts by using their regional expertise to solve problems.

Keywords: *High North politics, Barents Euro-Arctic Region, Norwegian-Russian bilateral relations, state-substate diplomacy, cross-border cooperation, local border traffic, borderland tourism.*

Regional substate diplomacy: some theoretical considerations

This body of work follows the now extensive literature on 'paradiplomacy', a term first used by Panayotis Soldatos [1, Soldatos P.] and later conceptually reworked by Ivo Duchacek, who also introduced new conceptual and typological approaches [2, Duchacek I.]. In recent decades, many researchers have grappled with the question of how foreign policy and modern diplomacy, in an increasingly interdependent global world, can still engage regional realities and sub- and non-state actors in foreign policy matters. Many substate actors today form their own foreign policies, in parallel to the central authority approach [3, Duchacek I., Latouche D., and Stevenson G.; 4, Michelmann H.J., Soldatos P; 5, Aldecoa F., Keating M.; 6, Majeed A., Watts R.L., Brown D. M; 7,

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Joenniemi P., Sergunin A.; 8, Jackson T.]. Since the earliest contributions, there is arguably now a more sophisticated and improved body of work on this topic: 'the spectrum of diplomatic instruments and the strategies that accompany them have become more diverse and complex' [9, Criekemans D., p. 1]. Authors have assumed that substate diplomacy is real, creating a new paradigm for dealing with international relations. Empirical studies have been dominated by analyses of the disintegration of traditional domestic and foreign policies and political centres. They have also explored periphery distinction: why regional state actors should 'go abroad', what impact substate involvement in international relations can have on traditional diplomacy; and in what ways substate actors can become involved in international relations. Comparative studies have also explored these issues. What types of competences do substate and state actors need? What types of juridical frameworks are available to substate actors when they 'go abroad'? Terms and names have also been thoroughly discussed (e.g. paradiplomacy, multileveled diplomacy, constituent diplomacy, and regional substate diplomacy). Discussions about theoretical approaches to paradiplomacy have been less enthusiastic. After surveying several book editions, Boyer [10, p. 99] concluded that 'we are left with complexity, but few simple answers'. Others have proposed applying agent-structure relationships at both the local and foreign-policy levels [11, Lecours A., p. 92]. This too is considered a complex task, as 'this phenomenon is so diverse and intertwined with so many different facets that it is quite difficult to come to terms with from a theoretical point of view' [9, Criekemans D., p. 5]. There seem to be no 'all-inclusive' theoretical approaches to paradiplomacy. More recently, researchers have suggested approaching it within the discipline of political geography, including it within the broad methodological tradition of critical geopolitics and paradiplomacy, and examining it using multi-spatial scales [8, Jackson T., p. 3]. It has been described as 'messy' and a 'contemporary puzzle', in the context of international relations. Analysing and investigating this subject will require multiple approaches and methods [10, Boyer M., p. 98; 8, Jackson T., p. 3]. To date, the issue has often been placed within the general framework of 'globalisation', as in the present article.

The empirical observations included in this text show that regional substate diplomacy 'negotiates' and finds a policy space within national foreign policy and the domestic-regional context, thus influencing the subnational approach to international activities. This account offers more detailed knowledge of the way in which substate diplomacy is *practiced* and by whom [9, Criekemans D., p. 5]. Regions, cities, companies, and nongovernmental organisations can cooperate to solve local issues involving trade, investments, collaboration, partnerships, and long-term, sustainable development. They may also raise questions about state-centred systems, international regulations, and the extent to which they place limitations on ambitions and ongoing work. Examples can be found in local discussions about developments in the Norwegian-Russian Barents borderland 25 years after the inauguration of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. For the last ten years in particular, there has been a focus on the High North areas of Norway and Russia. Periods of intensified bilateral cooperation and complex but integrated governance have been seen on both sides

of the border, facilitating people-to-people cooperation in entirely new ways. According to the Finish geographer Ansi Paasi [12, p. 20], a 'large scale territorial process' in international and regional governance can transform 'local contexts of everyday life and inherent experience and meanings'.

The policy practices that altered this regional reality in the Fennoscandian-Russian High North originate in part from the *Norwegian High North strategy* of 2006, with its strong focus on the Arctic. The Norwegian authorities cited their High North strategy as the central plank of Norway's foreign policy, in response to new global discussions of Arctic matters. In conceptualising the north, new tools and plans generated an interplay between foreign and domestic approaches, uniting state/national and subnational interests across the public and private spheres. This way of approaching bi- and multilateral issues challenges the traditional hierarchy of diplomatic relations by presupposing an integration of state/national government goals in the agendas of subnational/non-state actors. The general assumption, as the Norwegian High North strategy reveals, was that all Arctic-rim states would become responsible Arctic stewards, meeting the world community's expectations by implementing sustainable development in the High North, in relation to resource extraction, energy and fuel production, and sustainable development – in the face of a changing climate and fragile northern ecosystem. This assumption had important practical implications for bilateral interactions between Norwegian and Russian authorities in the shared peripheral borderland. In contemporary and more recent versions of the Russian Arctic strategy, we can trace some of these views on the 'new north'. How was the strategy discussed in the plan documents and enacted by central politicians? To what extent did it provide a frame for coherent national policy implementation in the Arctic, while leaving room for 'multi-layered regional and borderland governance' by national and subnational units conducting everyday business in small-scale peripheral sites? In what ways did the peripheral Norwegian-Russian borderland benefit; what was the impact on CBC and BEAR people-to-people interactions? Did it trigger new forms of borderland development, particularly on the Russian side?

Method: fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews

To address such questions, this paper examines the interplay of factors organised locally and nationally for trans-border purposes, including the development of new borderland networks (borderland conferences) and changes to visa regimes and their consequences (Norway/EU-Russia); these coexist alongside road and infrastructure improvements (Barents transport and infrastructure networks). Drawing on my training as a social anthropologist, I developed this body of work while living for many years in the Norwegian border town of Kirkenes, which is situated 12 km from Russian border and Murmansk Oblast. As an anthropologist inspired by the fieldwork method, I was able to immerse myself in small-scale local life, engaging with many central arenas during 10–12 years of Norwegian-Russian CBC and region-building approaches. During this period, the Norwegian government launched its High North strategy, increasing the CBC focus. There were

many events of general national interest, including delegations of central political authorities visiting the borderland, bilateral meetings between Norwegian and Russian central authorities, international political meetings, new local/regional forums, and the establishment of regional industrial-economic conferences and numerous seminars. In addition to acting as a participant observer at public events, I carried out many open-ended, semi-structured interviews with local politicians, regional authorities, and local stakeholders residing in the Russian Pechenga district and Murmansk City from 2009-2018¹. A discourse is about many things at the same time [13, Berkaak O.A., Frønes I., pp. 92–93) and these investigations introduced me to specific contexts of communication, interaction, and exchange, adding up to a complex layering of information or ‘thick description’ [14, Geertz C.] This text presents a genealogy of more or less integrated approaches and a commentary on High North development, seen from the vantage point of the small-scale Norwegian-Russian borderland. The fact that these investigations have spanned more than a decade has created a feedback loop of comparative questions and answers, leading to a deeper understanding of regional and local everyday practices. This study mirrors the multi-layered reality of global and regional governance that characterises the Norwegian and Russian Arctic Schengen borderland, and to some extent, other parts of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

The new north, decentralisation, and global governance

From 2003 onwards, the Norwegian government seemed prepared to think differently about international relations and diplomacy in the northernmost areas of the world. The Norwegian state was positioning itself in a larger global context, an approach that also became prominent in the Norwegian Government’s High North Strategy of 2006². During the following years, the northern strategy was officially regarded as the highest priority area in Norway’s foreign policy. The High North was viewed in an ambitious, all-inclusive, ‘holistic’ context. Prior to 2003, as Hønneland and Jensen have shown, Norway typically handled the region as a plurality of different (geo-) political layers, importantly connected to Russia, the neighbour in the east [15; see also 16, Hønneland G., Rowe L.; 17, Hønneland G.]. This was at the time more seldom seen as crucially related to Norway’s oceanic neighbours in the West (the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Iceland), or to Arctic Eight discussions in the Arctic Council, which includes the Nordic countries, Russia, Canada, and the US. Geographically (in 2006) the Norwegian High North policy applied to land and sea areas of the entire ‘European North’; as a result, the islands and groups of islands of Sør-Helgeland in the south, the Greenland Sea in the west, and the Pechora Sea in the east came under the same umbrella.

Politically, Norway’s High North policy addressed not only the administrative units associated with BEAR countries (the Nordic countries and Russia), but also the EU and its Northern Dimension policy on East-West cross-border relations and policy-making. In retrospect, the devel-

¹ I conducted group and individual interviews with people in the Russian borderland (Pechenga District) in 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015 and 2018 and in Murmansk city in 2014.

² The Norwegian Government’s High North Strategy, 2006. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo.

opment of Norwegian and Russian bilateral relations in the north makes it necessary to emphasise the extent to which the Norwegian High North policy depends on 'southern' Central European and EU regional integration practices associated with the EU European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Cooperation with North America (Canada and the US) was addressed through the Arctic Council. It was believed to support the interests of the Norwegian High North policy for all parts of international society to pull in the same direction, enhancing the development of all Arctic areas of the world. As Held [18] has pointed out, this broad ambition viewed complex governance and communication networks as useful in a scenario in which national policy would work through flexible and dynamic institutionalised systems, multi-layered global and regional governance, and an increasing number of inter-governmental organisations. This viewpoint suggests a rather 'cosmopolitan' understanding of global governance and international laws, crossing many decision-making boundaries associated with traditional national states. As Appadurai [19, p. 296] has argued, a new form of global cultural economy was emerging and the visions seemed to 'be understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models'. Centre-periphery verticals that exercise power are challenged when political distinctions between 'domestic' and 'foreign' policy are blurred. The world's global interdependence on High North issues did have an impact on government thinking about international relations in the north and ways of practicing diplomacy [20, Talbot S., p. 72].

More than just foreign policy

Among its priority areas, the Norwegian High North strategy focused on continuing good relations with Russia, sustainable management of natural resources, energy extraction opportunities in the Barents Sea, climate-change countermeasures, environmental protection, and improved living conditions for the peoples of the north, particularly indigenous cultures. The best way of solving these problems was thought to be: 'more than just foreign policy, and just domestic policy'.³ Such methods were not 'owned' by the central political authorities; the roadmap and especially policy implementation in the High North were partly 'decentralised' to the regions. This new approach and the national states' interest in the Arctic and sub-Arctic became profile elements in the personal agendas of prominent politicians visiting northern destinations. While visiting northern towns, the then Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre announced, 'The High North Strategy should be *owned* by the North and *experienced* in the North'; in another widely reported comment, he said: '*most* of it is north'.⁴

The new centre-periphery dynamics of the Norwegian government's High North policy involved transferring some responsibilities and ownership of issues from south to north; it challenged customary notions of centralism in the relationship between place and power. Prominent

³ The Norwegian Government's High North Strategy, 2006. Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo. p. 5.

⁴ Støre J.G. Det meste er nord- Nordområdene og veien videre-et internasjonalt perspektiv. Presentation at UiT, April 29, 2010. URL: www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/aktuelt/taler_artikler/jgs_taler_artikler/2012/nord_mest.html?id=602113 (accessed: 15 May 2016).

social democratic politicians felt that the importance of the north and its development were 'overshadowing' its 'southern' counterpart. The most important issues for future national development were associated with the north [21, Angell et al.]. When signing the document 'Nordområdene: Visjoner og Virkemidler' ('High North: Visions and Means') in 2011, Støre included Bodø, a north-west Norwegian town with a new university, along with the capital of Oslo, Norway. Thus, Norway's High North foreign policy implementation was lifted from traditional national state forums of expertise and decentralised to regional centres on the 'periphery' of northern Norway. The regions were suddenly included in the political discourse on the Subarctic; they were treated as responsible actors, fit to share and implement the visions and agendas of national state authorities. However, Oslo retained control of foreign policy, diplomacy, and security issues involving the Barents Sea, Arctic foreign policy and the important negotiations with Russia and other countries on the delimitation at sea of the Norwegian Exclusive Economic Zone. The northern regional CBC agenda was opened up for discussion at various forums, conferences, workshops and meetings, leading to public debate. There was active branding of the concept of the High North and a new civic relationship between national strategy documents, performative language, and the operationalisation of policies among politicians and the public [22, Larsen T.].

New foreign policy approaches in the Russian Arctic Schengen borderland

As the Norwegian government was decentralising many High North discussions to its northern communities and the north-eastern border municipality, a parallel process was also taking place in Russia. Russia's Arctic strategy, introduced in the *Basics of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period up to 2020 and for a further perspective* (Russian Federation, 2009), highlighted energy, security, industrial-economical activities and sustainable approaches to the northern environment (similar core topics are found in the Norwegian High North strategy). These topics are connected in the Russian strategy to security issues, economic wellbeing, and the assessment of a self-assertive nation being sovereign over its own national resources [23, Jensen L.C., Skedsmo P.A.]. Drawing on the interpretations of Laruelle [24, pp. 3–19] and Konyshov, Sergunin and Subbotin [25], I would argue that Russia's Arctic policy, even after Crimea and years of sanctions, still prioritises regional cooperation and the ambition of strengthening multilateral collaboration in the north. In the years preceding 2014, the Russian Ministry of Regional Development's determination to continue this work in the Russian north-west was bolstered by economic and organisational support from the mining giant Norilsk Nickel/Kolskaja GMK. With this backing, the Russian borderland community of politicians and local stakeholders was able to organise Russian-Norwegian Cross-Border Cooperation Days in 2011. Russian regional authorities actively promoted developments in the borderland; in 2010, the Norwegian (Schengen/EU) and Russian authorities reached an agreement to launch a joint Local Border Traffic (LBT) area opening, to intensify Russian-Norwegian cooperation, region building, and integration. The LBT discussions were officially begun by foreign ministers Støre and Lavrov in 2008 in

Kirkenes. This gave a political boost to the economically struggling mining towns of Nikel and Kirkenes, often associated with post-Soviet industrial decay and military-political surveillance; they now became linked to CBC, globalisation, and internationalisation.

This well-controlled local opening of the Russian north-western borderland was new in 2011 and something of a surprise to local people on both sides of the border. It established a regional inter-relationship in a spirit of internationalisation that was quite new, particularly given that this interplay between internationalisation and region building was not an explicit part of the Russian national Arctic strategy document [see 26, Bassin M., Ely C. & Stockdale M.K.; 27, Kinossian N.].

In the following years, the Russian Arctic borderland authorities have acted coherently with regard to Barents Euro-Arctic Regional cooperation. Regional authorities, including the governors of Murmansk Oblast (Dimitry Dimitrenko in 2011 and Marina Kovtun in the following years), supported this development in the Murmansk Oblast borderland, commenting favourably on the high-level settlement of the Barents Sea delimitation line in 2010 and the positive economic synergy this seemed to create for on-shore CBC. Region building through CBC became an element in Murmansk Oblast self-presentations and visions of the future.

The local border-zone visa came into effect on 29 May 2012 and is still operational⁵. The regional Murmansk authorities helped Russian diplomats and border guards explain and prepare for this new component of the LBT regime [7, Joenniemi P., Sergunin A.]. The open LBT and general CBC dialogue between local and regional authorities (and local-regional stakeholders) during the first (2011) Russian-Norwegian Border Cooperation Days in Russia was surprisingly open and honest⁶. Similar national and subnational interactions were held on the Norwegian side, as the mayor of Sør-Varanger municipality was a member of the committee preparing for the LBT visa regime [28, Haugseth P.].

It is also worth noting that the bilateral Norwegian-Russian LBT process was part of a larger multilateral and ongoing discussion among Schengen member states and Russia. The state authorities and diplomats of Norway and Russia continued to introduce the larger foreign policy background to audiences in Kirkenes and Nikel at various forums and local seminars. The most important issues needing resolution by the EU/Norway and Russia involved the border and the establishment of visa regimes. The larger LBT Schengen connection became apparent during the 4th Russian-Norwegian Border Cooperation days in autumn 2014, organised to coordinate with the 5th Annual European Border dialogues: the Forum on Cross-Border cooperation in a Wider Europe. In addition to various actors from different levels of the Russian and Norwegian governments (local,

⁵ Nordområdene. Visjon og virkemidler. St.melding 7. Melding til stortinget (2011–2012), and Utenriksdepartementet (2014) Nordkloden. Verdiskapning og ressurser. Klimaendringer og kunnskap. Utviklingen i nord angår oss alle. Nordområdene. Statusrapport 2014. URL: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/23843eabac77454283b0769876148950/nordkloden_rapport-red.pdf (accessed: 21 June 2017).

⁶ CBC seminar, day two of the first Russian-Norwegian Border cooperation days in Borisoglebsk, Pechenga District, 2011.

regional, national, and NGOs) in Finnmark County and Murmansk Oblast, representatives from other member/non-member EU states and non-EU countries members also participated, offering local and regional expertise. Participants from peripheral and previously closed areas of Russia (Kaliningrad) took part in the conference in Pechenga District, exchanging insights about their LBT CBC experiences with Poland.

In Norway and Russia, the political discourse about this LBT was generally quite optimistic. In north-east Norway (at local seminars) the visa regime was even seen as paving the way for a total abolition of visas between Norway and Russia (possibly also the rest of Europe, as it is a Schengen-zone border)⁷. Some Norwegian diplomats used the Norwegian-Swedish border regime as an example of how things could develop favourably between Norway and Russia. Russian diplomats called attention to the border between the Kaliningrad region of Russia and Poland, citing it as a model LBT, where agreement had been reached to make interesting geographical extensions to the original LBT zone. Nevertheless, the case of Kaliningradskaya Oblast and the adjacent counties in Poland is rather complicated; the history before and after EU enlargement in 2004 and the entry in 2007 of several new EU member states to the Schengen area, became a point of contention between Russia and the EU [29, Browning C.S.; 30, Allison R., Light M. & White S.]. Notes on the EU-Russia relationship 'between integration and confrontation' were made at local seminars, where the Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Kirkenes participated [31, for discussion, see Prozorov S.].

A growing minority in Russia saw the EU/Schengen area enlargement as 'part of a process of re-establishing the containment of Russia' [32, Mankoff J., p. 143]. As the Schengen area expanded towards the east, the optimistic discourses associated with the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and its vision of a 'wider Europe free of dividing lines' contrasted rather badly with stifling customs procedures at the new Schengen borders, wherever they were drawn, causing critical commentators to speak about the establishment of 'a new Iron Curtain' or 'Golden Curtain'. Kaliningrad residents, for instance, found themselves suddenly surrounded by EU member states and had to apply for visas to visit other parts of Russia. In practice, the enlargement led to a dramatic fall in the number of visas issued in Kaliningrad, the Ukraine, and Belarus.⁸ Against this background, the LBT Regime (LBTR) was useful, offering local border-zone visas to borderland residents for a reasonable price. Russia, in addition to the LBTR with Norway and Poland, also has similar arrangements with Latvia. For various reasons, however, no LBTRs have been established between Russia and Finland, Lithuania, or Estonia. The Norwegian-Russian LBTR stands out as positively different. It has proven to be robust, even under stress, for example, during the refugee cri-

⁷ Grenseseminarer 'Grenseborgere eller begrensede borgere? February 9, 2012, Kirkenes. Arr. Finnmark University College, UiT-Barents institute, Sør-Varanger municipality/Kirkenes kompetansesenter and the 'Living in the Centre-Periphery' September 25–26, 2012. Kirkenes- Nikel. Research Days 2012, Arr. Finnmark University College, Murmansk State Humanities University, Sør-Varanger Municipality and Pechenga Municipality District Administration.

⁸ Yliseyeu A. Keeping the Door Ajar: Local Border Traffic Regimes on the EU's Eastern Borders. The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki, 2014.

sis of 2015. It is fair to say that it has boosted a new era of cooperation between the countries in the north. LBT regulation has made it far easier for people living in Sør-Varanger Municipality to vacation and shop in the Russian borderland of Pechenga Rayon. Today, Norwegian 'borderlanders' are increasingly aware of the many opportunities on offer in Murmansk Oblast, and particularly in Murmansk itself – the largest city in the Arctic.

The distance between county/oblast politicians and places on the periphery of their regions diminished when the industrial mono towns at the border, Nickel, Zapolyarny, and Kirkenes, were given new roles as implementers of transnational cooperation. Although the far-flung margins of regional districts received few economic benefits, symbolically and politically, there was definite change. Its practical value was apparent at the 5th Russian-Norwegian Cross-Border Cooperation Days held in November 2015. None of the participating local and regional politicians could fail to see the rising wave of refugees then pouring into Norway via Murmansk, Nickel, and Kirkenes. This unexpected stream of non-Russian, non-Norwegian travellers put a huge strain on the small local units in Kirkenes responsible for receiving refugees and assessing the status of each individual. However, both nations rose to the challenge of managing the borderlands, demonstrating the importance of having a well-established dialogue between regional and national authorities in both countries, who were hard-pressed to find solutions to the escalating crisis.

More recently, high-level Russian and Norwegian government representatives have pointed to the High North and the Barents region as peaceful arenas characterised by dialogue and cooperation. This point was made at regional conferences in Norway in 2015–2017 by the former Norwegian Foreign Minister Børge Brende (except in 2015 when the opening address was dominated by the international crisis and response to the Crimea situation and Russia's involvement),⁹ as well as in 2018 by his successor, Ine Eriksen Søreide.¹⁰ They expressed support for the BEAR and regional cooperation in the north during times of European and global challenges. A good bilateral dialogue between Norway and Russia continues at a subnational level in the north, and is fully in line with the present Norwegian Liberal/Conservative government's High North initiatives of 2014¹¹ and 2017¹². The High North remains a focus in strategic foreign policy and, according to the 2017 strategy, it depends on the interplay between foreign and domestic politics and dialogue between the centre and periphery of the state. This stands in contrast to the general Russia policy espoused by Norwegian national authorities in the south, which is strongly affected by the situation in eastern Ukraine and the international community's condemnation. Northern local people,

⁹ Brende B. Opening Address. Presentation at The Kirkenes Conference, February 4, 2015, February 10-11, 2016, and February 8-9, 2017, Kirkenes. Arr. Kirkenes Business Park.

¹⁰ Søreide Ine Eriksen. Opening Address. Presentation at The Kirkenes Conference, February 21, 2018, Kirkenes.

¹¹ Utenriksdepartementet (2014) Nordkloden. Verdiskapning og ressurser. Klimaendringer og kunnskap. Utviklingen i nord angår oss alle. Nordområdene. Statusrapport 2014. URL: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/23843eabac77454283b0769876148950/nordkloden_rapport-red.pdf (accessed: 21 June 2017).

¹² Utenriksdepartementet og kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet (2017). Nordområdemeldingen: Mellom geopolitikk og samfunnsutvikling. URL: https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/fad46f0404e14b2a9b551ca7359c1000/strategi_nord_2017_d.pdf (accessed: 27 June, 2017).

who remember the 'enthusiasm' of the early days of the High North policy, comment that the central authorities in Oslo have lost interest in the Fennoscandian north. Nevertheless, as stated above, official northern policy declarations remain positive.

Russian official communications about the northern borderlands indicate that Russia's main principles on Arctic issues, approved by the Kremlin in 2009, still prevail. More could be done to further northern and BEAR cooperation, but Moscow's interpretation of the potential threats in the area changed slightly after the Ukrainian crisis and the sanctions imposed by Western countries [25, Konyshov V., Sergunin A., Subbotin S.].¹³ The present representative of the Russian Federation in Kirkenes, the Consulate General Shatunovskiy-Byurno,¹⁴ and Chair of Barents Euro-Arctic Council Sergey Petrovich have addressed the importance of regional cooperation on numerous occasions.¹⁵ Petrovich maintains that it 'remains a sustainable peace project which offers us considerable opportunities'. Such statements confirm that Russia's official Arctic strategy continues to be consistent and transparent, in relation to the points made at inter-regional forums with Nordic and Russian attendance. All of this adds up to a general consensus on the stability of the north, in the face of 'ups' and 'downs' in international relations. Eventually, this way of thinking could perceive the Barents Euro-Arctic Region not as a static idea, but as one capable both of developing over time, and also of being transferred to other geographic settings, as a dynamic 'imagined community', to build trust and facilitate CBC in the north and other regions of the world [for a further conceptual discussion, see e.g. 33, Hønneland G; 34, Hønneland G.; 35, Anderson B.].

***Increased CBC traffic across reorganised borderland space:
Transport and infrastructure and the new effects of changing visa regimes***

As a result of the BEAR collaboration, the so-called Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA) was conceived. Through multilateral work, a Barents transport plan was launched; it produced solid results and enthusiasm for coordinating the construction of various parts of a much improved BEAR cross-border transport network.¹⁶ The main priority for some time had been European highway E105, the road connecting Russia and Norway in the sub-Arctic. The poor infrastructure of the E105 border station was improved during the construction process. The new Bøkfjord

¹³ Basics of the Russian Federation's State Policy in the Arctic for the Period until 2020 and for a Further Perspective. (Published on the Internet as appendix to:) Rossiyskaya Gazeta: Capital Release no. 4877, March 27 2009. URL: www.rg.ru/2009/03/30/arktika-osnovy-dok.html (дата обращения: 15.10.2015) and Russian federation [2013] "Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian federation." URL: <http://iecca.ru/en/legislation/strategies/item/99-the-development-strategy-of-the-arctic-zone-of-the-russian-federation> (accessed: 1 September 2018).

¹⁴ Shatunovskiy-Byurno S. Russian Attitudes to Border Cooperation and Local Border Traffic Regimes. Presentation given at Comparing Schengen Borderlands: Experiences from Slovakia-Ukraine and Norway-Russia. 4-6 April 2017 in Kirkenes. Arr. UiT-The Arctic University of Norway, Campus Kirkenes and Slovak Foreign Policy Association. (2018) New Visa Regimes in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and Beyond: Russian Views on Local Border Traffic (LBT). Presentation given at Grenseseminar 2018, Barents Beyond Borders. Arr. UiT - The Arctic University of Norway, Kirkenes, Barents institute and dept. of Tourism Research and Northern studies, 22 February 2018.

¹⁵ Petrovich S. The Barents Region as a Model for International Cooperation. Presentation at The Kirkenes Conference, February 8-9, 2017.

¹⁶ Naimak T. 'Fremtidig trafikktutvikling i nord'. Paper presented at The Kirkenes conference, February 21, 2018.

Bridge (268 meters), which crosses the Pasvik River at the border and links to the adjacent Trifon tunnel (named after the 16th century Russian orthodox monk and missionary, Holy Saint Triphon of Pechenga) were completed on the Norwegian part of E105 in the autumn of 2017. This road development was nominated as Norway's most significant road construction project in 2018. The improved section of the E105 cost some 875 million NOK (€93 million). The Norwegian Minister of Transport and Communication, Ketil Solvik-Olsen, said at the opening of the bridge: 'this is a bridge for the mutual benefit of businesses in both Norway and Russia'.¹⁷ The Bøkfjord Bridge is considered the most important single result of the BEAR CBC. Together with extensive improvements to the highway on the Russian side, it has reduced the distance between Kirkenes and Murmansk by 25 km. Although the cost has been high on the Norwegian side, the Russian costs were probably higher. Only 12 out of the 210 km between Kirkenes and Murmansk are on the Norwegian side. The excellent new road connection between the border station and Zapolyarny in Russia was completed in the autumn of 2014. Although it circumvented Nickel on the road to Murmansk, the auxiliary roads around Nickel have also been recently upgraded.

The BEATA has also put in place high-tech 'smart' road monitoring systems that are now being tested in Norwegian-Finish Barents territory, between Skibotten in Norway and across the border to Kolari in Finland. Further 'smart' transport routes are being considered to connect Tromsø in Norway to Oulu, Finland. The system uses sensors to keep track of transport and road conditions. It secures transport and promotes environmentally friendly operations by reducing the use of energy and decreasing the risk of traffic incidents.

The main driver or obstacle to border crossing traffic between Norway and Russia at the individual level is still the visa regime. Starting in the spring of 2012, the LBT agreement between the two countries, across the Schengen-border, has been based on a visa regulation signed by the Norwegian and Russian authorities on 2 November 2010.¹⁸ Given that there are only 9,000 inhabitants on the Norwegian side who are eligible for the LBT (border-zone visa), but 45,000 inhabitants on the Russian side, the Norwegians visit their close neighbours more often. In practice, fewer than the specified number of people can obtain LBT visas in the Russian borderland territory, as local inhabitants often have only a national passport, due to their affiliation with the military sector.

However, as the LBT visa is not a work or residence permit, LBT visitors gain access to a fairly limited set of activities in a limited geographical area. At the same time, no invitation is needed; the bureaucracy involved in applying for a visa and making the border crossing is much less costly and demanding than standard visa procedures. Russian visitors can enter Norwegian

¹⁷ Nilsen T. Norway builds a new bridge to Russia. Independent Barents Observer, 19 May 2017. URL: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/borders/2017/05/norway-builds-new-bridge-russia>. (accessed: 23 May 2017) and 'Bridge and new highway linking Norway and Russia officially opens. Independent Barents Observer, 29 September 2017. URL: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/borders/2017/09/norway-opens-new-bridge-road-russia>. (accessed: 1 October 2018).

¹⁸ Det kongelige utenriksdepartement. Nordområdene. Visjon og virkemidler. St.melding 7. Melding til stortinget (2011–2012). 2011.

territory up to 30 kilometres from the border. Norwegians can visit specific places within 30–50 kilometres of the border; this area includes the towns of Nikel and Zapolyarny. An LBT is valid for three years and visa holders must have lived in the border zone for more than three years. Third-country inhabitants can also apply for an LBT.

Between the launch of this LBT visa regime in 2012 and April 2017, close to 6,300 Norwegians had received an LBT visa from the Russian Consulate General in Kirkenes. This amounts to 70% of the whole population eligible to apply for a visa. Around 2,000–3,000 Norwegians (40% of all people holding an LBT) use their border-zone visas regularly. According to a survey carried out in 2018 by the present author, of the 60 adolescents between 14–15 years old in Kirkenes, 70% had visited Russia and 40% held an LBT visa.¹⁹ Overall, 60% visited Russia annually and more than once. 18.3% visited the Russian borderland more than 6 times a year; 58% had participated in sports, culture or municipality cooperation.

Only a few of the 50 people interviewed in Pechenga District in 2014 held LBT visas. The most frequent explanation was that it was too time consuming and costly to travel to the nearest visa centre, located in the Norwegian Consulate General's office in Murmansk. The same explanation was given by the school pupils we interviewed. They prioritised homework, but would welcome CBC school exchanges or projects with Norwegian partners. Only one out of 21 pupils in Zapolyarny held an LBT visa, while two had a Schengen visa. Almost 30% had been to Norway. Russians in general prefer to have a Schengen visa, rather than an LBT, because it gives them the freedom to travel further and to visit other European countries and destinations. By 2014, Norwegian LBT holders had made over 45,000 border crossings. The number was somewhat lower in 2015; although it increased again in 2016, it remained at a level lower than in 2014.

Both in Norway and Russia, the LBT visa regime is considered a success during periods of international turmoil. Before it was in place, local people and shop owners in Kirkenes, including some police officials, expressed concern that the visa would increase crime rates. This has not proven to be the case. The sub-Arctic LBT visa regime has remained intact and successful through recent periods of tension created by external events: hostilities in Crimea and Ukraine, the ensuing economic sanctions, ups and downs in the value of the rouble hitting border business, the dramatic refugee situation on the border in the autumn of 2015, followed by fence building on the Norwegian side in 2016. As if these were not enough, sinister cases of surveillance and espionage are now damaging the Norwegian-Russian relationship at the national level. Despite everything, northern cross-border work, people-to-people exchanges in the BEAR, and the Sør-Varanger-Pechenga LBT visa regime remain operational and seem to run smoothly, in spite of all adversity.

¹⁹ The interviews were conducted in September 2018; they involved pupils at high schools in Sør-Varanger Municipality (Norway) and the Pechenga District (Russia).

***Opening for more CBC and tourism development:
Russian authorities seek new opportunities in the borderland***

The political and administrative innovations in the Barents borderland, from 2008 onwards, encouraged debate on the need for further infrastructural improvements: easing customs procedures, streamlining borderland regulations, sharing expanded border station facilities, and meeting the need for increased cross-border traffic in more cost-effective ways. Local and regional authorities in Pechenga soon joined this border discourse and they wanted to increase cross-border tourism. From a West-European popular perspective, Pechenga District in the Russian borderland with Norway is an interesting case in point in the West-European popular perspective on this. From being the archetypical instance of a “closed” post-Soviet Cold War industrial context haunted by its geopolitical and military-strategic history also associated with physical hazards, environmental degradation, and social turmoil. Pechenga District they began to host actual guided tours that provided an educational experience, introducing a Soviet collective endeavour to create good lives for an entire remote community in a harsh natural setting – a ‘project’ unknown to Western capitalism. Admittedly, to get the most from such a profound ‘risk society’ experience, a tourist must keep an open mind and hone his or her ability, not just to look at landscapes and destinations but also to ask questions, listen to the guide and learning something new [36, Beck U.]. The borderland also offers the more conventional attractions of down-hill skiing, spa culture, and angling in remote rapids and streams on the tundra [37, Haugseth P., Wråkberg U.; 38, Ilkevich S., Stroemberg P.].

In general, the Russian Arctic tends to be associated with a tough climate, open expanses for outdoor activities, wildlife adventures, rich cultural heritage, and the post-Soviet memories that surround the decaying structures of decommissioned military outposts [39, Wråkberg U.]. Several times since the Russian-Norwegian Border Crossing Days of 2011, a guided excursion in the Pechenga district has made an inventory of potential regional tourism sites. In collaboration with local Russian guides, many potential quality attractions have been identified in this Norwegian-Russian borderland. They involve the history of the indigenous East-Sámi peoples, the region’s multi-layered cultural heritage, and Soviet sites that symbolise much more than mere environmental degradation – even though some contemporary visitors are unable to see that. Here, as in many other countries, visits to Second World War Memorial sites are central to the experience. One pilgrimage destination rich in meanings is in the resurrected Monastery of Saint Triphon of Pechenga in Luostari. The present study has identified several interesting and accessible attractions, which could serve as focal points for more northern culture-based tourism [37, Haugseth P., Wråkberg U.; 40, MacCannel, 1999 (1976)].

The Pechenga monastery is not simply an impressive religious symbol, with obvious architectural appeal, but a testament to the fact that the Russian authorities, as part of the LBT regulation process, have taken the trouble to open many sites to visitors from foreign countries and other Russian districts that were previously off-limits, within the restricted military sector. However,

the Pechenga monastery is situated at the end of the modified LBT zone; no Norwegian visitor can continue driving east towards Murmansk after passing Luostari/Korsunovo because once past the road to this settlement (which was closed to all foreigners before May 2012), you have crossed the line of the LBT zone.

Since 2012, the Pechenga administration and local business entrepreneurs have promoted the idea of moving thousands of short-term visiting cruise passengers and other tourists across the border with Norway to tourism-friendly destinations within the district. However, the cost of issuing tourism visas and the time-limits usually set on these have made this vision unworkable. This situation may now be about to change. On 22 July 2016, the Russian authorities launched a 72-hour visa-free regime in Murmansk and Arkhangelsk. This facility could be offered in the future also to passengers taking coastal cruises on the Norwegian 'Hurtigruta' line, who could enjoy a stop-over at Kirkenes. It is yet to be confirmed whether 72-hour visas could be made available to tourists visiting Kirkenes in 3-hour time slots, enabling a very short day-trip to the nearby Russian Pechenga district. Asian tourists are already finding their way, both to northern Norway (flying in to Kirkenes) and to the Russian north-west Arctic via Murmansk airport; never before in history has the Russian North been accessible on such a scale for international tourism [41, Ashutova T., Belevskikh T., Shestova Y., forthcoming].

The plans for extending the Hurtigruta line (which traditionally connects Bergen in south-west Norway to Kirkenes along the Norwegian coast), with destinations in the Russian Barents region, are being put into practice. These cruises will depart from the North Norwegian city of Tromsø from autumn 2019, go east via Kirkenes, including sites on the High Arctic archipelago of Franz Josef Land, and always call in at the harbour of Murmansk.²⁰

Conclusion

The present article has advanced beyond the general understanding that the High North borderland development between Norway and Russia has been affected by the world's growing interdependence, as global attention is drawn toward the northernmost part of the world. The Norwegian and the Russian authorities have also taken steps to develop the High North regions in new ways, increasing their political ambition, interest, and commitment to developing the High North areas.

As this study has attempted to pinpoint details while also sketching in the general picture, the concepts of 'paradiplomacy' and 'regional substate diplomacy' have been useful for studying the processes through which state and substate interactions have facilitated and acted as efficient CBC instruments in the High North. The concepts shed light on the interplay of domestic and foreign policy instruments applied during substate interactions, which eventually did open the region to more efficient cooperation across national state borders. Researchers have argued that ten

²⁰ Hurtigruta. Norge, Murmansk, Frans Josefs land - Seil nord for 80° til det russiske Arktis. Available at: <https://www.hurtigruten.com/destinations/russia/>, 2018. (accessed: 26 May 2018).

years after the Norwegian and Russian governments intensified their approach to the High North through innovative measures, the situation has changed, particularly as a result of people-to-people interactions in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). Cities, municipalities, and local people are today more open and favourably included to use CBC instruments legally to engage more actively in cross-border traveling and cooperation. Parts of the Russian borderland that were previously off-limits have been opened and made accessible to Norwegian and international visitors. The present paper has used case studies and relevant discourses to illustrate the importance of regionally driven state-substate interactions. Especially those new openings that have proved successful in tipping the balance of traditional centre-periphery relations in favour regional initiatives but kept well within major national interests. The article has made a more inclusive overview of several of the small steps in this practise of regional sub-state diplomacy, steps that are too often neglected in high-flying geopolitical generalisations. Introduced have therefore experiments of new political High North communication, the branding of the High North through official documents, and the transfer of envisioned industrial-economic high-tech scenarios from state to local level. In addition, small-scale visions relating to the border-zone visa (LBT) have partially generated outputs, including new cross-border forums to discuss ways to improve transport, roads, and infrastructure in the borderland. These developments have altered our geographical imagination to such an extent that new borderland concepts have suddenly begun to emerge. This includes tourism and destination development on the Russian side of the border. This paper explores events that have occurred during the past ten years, as a result of the ambitious Arctic strategies implemented by the Norwegian and Russian governments in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and the sub-Arctic borderland between Norway and Russia.

It is clear that large- and small-scale bilateral discussions are particularly important; despite being framed within regulations and national strategy in the capital, they are operationalised and acted upon by regional and local politicians and stakeholders. Substate diplomacy brings regional expertise to bear on national initiatives to advance regional trans-border matters. As this article points out, recent initiatives on CBC have reactivated and revitalised old forms of post-Cold War approaches to cooperation in important informal 'people-to-people' ways. These endeavours also make an important contribution to the bilateral relationship between Norway and Russia. In a world full of dilemmas and international tension (especially after the Crimea), national state authorities often rely on CBC results in the north, continuing to forecast optimism and stability.

The present study has provided insights into the process through which the 'new North' and its 'multi-layered global governance' were created through small-scale activities at local peripheral sites. The benefits and robustness of this practise of governance are clear only if we study them on-site and on the ground in the High North of the Norwegian-Russian borderland.

Given the extent of geo-economic change on the European and global scene in recent years, it is also fair to conclude that a supportive local and regional ethos remains intact, based as it is in long good traditions for interactions in the borderland, by regional trade, by travel for cul-

tural and human contacts and for tourism. The continuity in these activities testifies to the unique tradition of exchange and partnerships at the cross-roads of the European High North.

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