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## The Arctic Council: transition of chairmanship from the US to Finland, further strengthening of Russian-Finnish cooperation



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**Abstract.** The article deals with the results of the 2 years of the US chairmanship of the Arctic Council, notes positive results and draws attention to the weak points of the US Arctic policy. It reveals that the US has chaired the AC to solve its own problems related to the Arctic. The authors also analyze the ministerial meeting in Fairbanks (Alaska) and describe the current Russian position in the Arctic. The foundations of the Finnish Arctic policy and the analysis of the first

statements of politicians and experts helps the author to predict the Finland's plans for the chairmanship in the Arctic Council 2017–2019, and its possible impact on settling differences in Russian-American and Russian-Western European relations. In addition, it is important to take a closer look at the role of the Finland's chairmanship in strengthening the Russian-Finnish cooperation in the run-up of the 100 anniversary of the independent Finnish state (December 2017). It is found that in contrast to Canada, the United States did not transfer the existing contradictions between the US and Russia to the work of the Arctic Council. It largely contributed to the positive results of the US chairmanship, especially on the development of multi-lateral cooperation of the coast guards, international fisheries in the Arctic Ocean and the problems of communication networks in the Arctic.

**Keywords:** *The Arctic Council, the Arctic, Russia, Canada, UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Northern Sea Route, ice-breaker fleet, scientific research, national security*

The chairmanship of the Arctic Council (AC, the Council), whose members are Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia, USA, Finland and Sweden, was passed from Washington to Helsinki on May 12, 2017 at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the American town of Fairbanks (Alaska). The U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson handed over the chairmanship of the Arctic Council to the representative of Finland — Minister for Foreign Affairs Timo Soini.

The Chairmanship is moving from one participating country to another on a rotational basis for two years. The first country-chairman of the Council was Canada (1996–1998), and then it was the USA, Finland, Iceland, Russia, Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The second cycle of the chairmanship began in 2013, and then Canada was replaced by the United States two years after.

### ***Results of the US Chairmanship of the Arctic Council***

The presidency of the United States in the AC took place from 2015 to 2017. That time the world social and political situation was extremely complicated. All the Arctic countries imposed sanctions against Russia, which, in turn, responded with its counter-sanctions. So, the Arctic cooperation minimized, especially in environmental protection. However, to the credit of the United

States, they did not move the existing issues between the US and Russia to the work of the AC, which is not true for Canada, who chaired the AC before the United States.

First, a certain progress has been achieved in the development of multilateral cooperation of the coastal guards. On October 31, 2015, in the town of New London (USA), the official representatives of the agencies, performing the functions of the coast guards of the AC member states, signed the Joint statement of intention to develop a multilateral cooperation in a form of a Forum of the Arctic Coastal Guards. It has the status of an independent body legally not affiliated to any agreements. Participating countries: Russia, Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Norway, USA, Finland, and Sweden. The change of chairmanship is done on a two-year rotation basis and interconnected with the chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

The Forum participants discussed the risks and security threats in the Arctic: the development of oil and gas deposits on the Arctic continental shelf; the development of the sea transport and the increase of shipping along the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage; cooperation in the field of search and rescue at sea; emergency response to the marine environment damages. It was noted that the development of offshore fields, scientific research, tourism and maritime traffic lead to the increase of risks in the border area. It is violation of borders, illegal migration, smuggling, possible infiltration of terrorism in the region.

The FSB of Russia Border Service (FSBR BS) has a positive practice of interaction with colleagues from the Arctic States [1, Zdorovtsev I.A., pp. 102–105] especially with the units of the Coast Guard of Norway and the US 17th district Coast Guard [2, p. 59]. The FSBR BS together with the Norwegian colleagues make the joint efforts in protecting the marine biological resources of the Barents Sea. It means the prevention of poaching; broader cooperation in the search and rescue of persons in distress at the Barents Sea; information exchange during the monitoring surface conditions in the adjacent waters; the exchange of experience on the protection of maritime boundaries and training of crews of the ships.

The US Coast Guard and the FSBR BS for the Kamchatsky Krai (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky) have gained quite extensive experience in joint patrols made by ships and aircraft to ensure the compliance with the Convention for the Conservation of Anadromous Stocks in the North Pacific Ocean. A certain cooperation is visible in the exchange of information during patrols in the Chukchi Sea. In addition, the guards of both states share information on shipping in the Bering Strait

(see Art. 2 of The Russia — United States maritime boundary agreement June 1, 1990<sup>1</sup>) and the movement of ships, which crews are suspected of unlawful activities.

At the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, despite of some differences in the functions of participants, there is a great potential for joint solution of regional security issues. The common efforts will enhance the maritime safety and security of every person in the Arctic.

Secondly, the Forum was a place for fruitful consultations on issues of international fisheries in the Arctic Ocean. In June 2015, Russia, USA, Norway, Canada and Denmark signed an agreement to ban fishing in international waters of the Arctic. The agreement applies to high seas area located outside the exclusive economic zones of the Arctic states.

Thirdly, for the first time in the AC history, the USA studied the communication networks in the Arctic region.

Fourth, the analysis showed, during the US presidency, the country understood and publicly acknowledged that the US had paid insufficient attention to the Arctic and had fallen behind Russia, Norway and Canada [3, Zhuravel V.P., pp. 19–21]. To prove it, we could mention that the US President Obama was the first incumbent U.S. President visited the area behind the Arctic Circle and met its residents.

The USA are a step behind in the construction of icebreakers. Currently they have three of them, but only two can operate in the Arctic. In addition, according to experts, the existing icebreakers are unable to provide quick and efficient help in case of possible disasters caused by the oil production in the Arctic Ocean. The US President decided to start building another heavy icebreaker with a total value of up to \$1 billion with the commissioning two years earlier — in 2020. On May 5, 2017, the commander of the US coast guard Paul Zukunft in his speech<sup>2</sup> complained about the lack of icebreakers in the country.

That time, several activities strengthened the interest of the US citizens to the polar affairs and the “Arctic status” of America. Primarily, it is about the signing of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. While the USA is not a part of the UNCLOS, it hurts the image of the country and creates a discrepancy of its position and the position of the other AC countries. It is also the potential to change the US position on the Arctic issues.

Fifth, we should note that the AC bodies continued to operate in the former regime during the US chairmanship. It allowed the US and its AC colleagues in the AU to prepare several im-

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<sup>1</sup> The Russia — United States maritime boundary agreement was signed in Washington on June 1, 1990. The agreement delineates the territorial sea, economic zone and continental shelf in the Chukchi and Bering Seas and the Arctic ocean

<sup>2</sup> Rossiya ne ostavila shansov SShA v Arktike. [Russia did not leave any chances for the US in the Arctic]. URL: <https://www.ridus.ru/news/251741> (Accessed: 13 May 2017) [in Russian]

portant documents to be signed in Fairbanks. The Arctic Council consists of six working groups on its major activities: Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAR); Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); The Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPPR); Working Group on Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME); Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG); the Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP).

Sixthly, the foreign Ministers of the eight Arctic States discussed key issues of strengthening international cooperation in the Arctic to contribute to the sustainable development of the region. The final Fairbanks Declaration 2017 reaffirms the commitment to the peaceful development of the Arctic, mutually beneficial cooperation, focus on environmental activities and emphasizes the importance of a joint steps to adapt to the climate change. The §23 of the Declaration states: ... the Arctic is warming at more than twice the rate of the global average, note with concern that the pace and scale of continuing Arctic warming will depend on future emissions of greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants, reiterate the importance of global action to reduce both greenhouse gases and short-lived climate pollutants to mitigate climate change, and call for the Arctic Council to undertake additional analyses to contribute to the assessment reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and continued collaboration with all levels of governments...".

Seventh, in accordance with the decisions of the Ministerial meetings of the AC, reflected in the Kiruna Declaration 2013 and Iqaluit Declaration, 2015, the participants of the meeting signed an Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of the Agreement is to strengthen cooperation in the field of scientific activities, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the scientific knowledge about the Arctic. The Agreement aims to facilitate international research, to intensify the contacts between scientists and the exchange of scientific knowledge, to simplify the border crossing and create more opportunities for joint use of scientific infrastructure.

It clearly defines the geographical areas where the countries-participants will help in obtaining permits to conduct research, use of scientific infrastructure, etc. in accordance with the home and international legislation. The Agreement's structure does not leave any space for prejudice the existing agreements between the Arctic and non-Arctic states and does not narrow the possibilities of scientific research in the Arctic for the latter. The development of this Agreement took four years within a specially established AC working group. The group's co-chairs were Russia and the US.

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<sup>3</sup> The draft of this Declaration was approved by the Russian Government on the April 19, 2017 Order № 735-p.

This is the third agreement. Two more had been signed before: on cooperation in aviation and maritime rescue (January 2013) and on oil spills and marine environment in the Arctic (May 2013). These international binding agreements increased the responsibility for decision-making and at the same time, contributed greatly to increase the authority of the AC.

Meeting in Fairbanks held in a friendly atmosphere. Originally, a place of meeting was Anchorage. However, the public of Fairbanks had offered their town, as it was the northernmost settlement of the US with airport and railway. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada Chrystia Freeland welcomed the Russian delegation in Russian. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergei Lavrov, Russia's Ambassador in the U.S. Sergey Kislyak and the mayor of Fairbanks Jim Matherly laid wreaths at the monument to the heroes of the air route Alaska — Siberia. In 1942–1945 Soviet and American pilots took about eight thous combat aircrafts from Fairbanks under the lend-lease program<sup>4</sup>. At the Fairbanks meeting, Switzerland got the AC observer status. It does not provide the right to vote but this event once again demonstrates the increased interest in the Arctic from a wide range of non-Arctic States<sup>5</sup>.

#### ***Focus of the Finland's chairmanship of the Arctic Council***

At the meeting in Fairbanks, The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland spoke out about the four main areas for the AC until 2019:

- 1) Environmental protection and biodiversity conservation in the North; healthy ecosystems and human well-being in the Arctic require effective conservation measures. It is proposed to focus on the conservation of biological diversity, the prevention of pollution, adaptation to climate change, exchange of practices and new technologies to promote sustainable and responsible development of the Arctic;
- 2) Development of communication networks in the region. Electronic communications services increase the safety and quality of life of those living in or temporarily located in the Arctic. Access to broadband facilitates the e-learning, contributes to the digital health systems, social services and media. It is proposed to continue the AC work for telecommunications and to explore the possibilities of improving communication and broadband network accessibility in the Arctic;

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<sup>4</sup> Dobro pozhalovat v Ferbanks: sotrudnichestvo v Arktike na dele, a ne na slovak. [Welcome to Firebanks: cooperation indeed, not just words] 12.05.2017. URL: <http://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/4246374>; Lavrov i Kislyak vozlozhili cvety k pamyatniku geroyam Alsiba na Alyaske. [Lavrov and Kislyak laid flowers to the monument to the heroes of the Alsib Alaska]. URL: <http://tass.ru/politika/4246202> (Accessed: 18 May 2017) [in Russian]

<sup>5</sup> Todorov A.A. Na Alyaske podpisano trete panarkticheskoe soglasenie. Chto prinesyot Rossii predsedatel'stvo Finlyandii v Arkticheskom sovete? [In Alaska, the third pan-Arctic agreement was signed. What will bring the Finnish chairmanship of the Arctic Council will bring?]. URL: <https://riss.ru/analitics/40836/> (Accessed: 18 May 2017) [in Russian]

- 3) Increase the number of weather stations to monitor the condition of the ice, ocean and atmosphere. This will increase public safety, benefit the international shipping and air traffic, help the development of climate science in the Arctic, increase the quality of networks of monitoring and observation, and the management of risks associated with climate and water. Enhanced monitoring on land, sea, atmosphere and space will help in obtaining accurate data and filling in geographical gaps, which in turn will lead to the improved transport services and forecasting in the Arctic and will help to develop much-needed scenarios of climate change. It is proposed to continue cooperation between Arctic states with the assistance of the World meteorological organization;
- 4) Implementing educational programs for indigenous youth<sup>6</sup>.

Finland's activities in the Arctic aimed at maintaining stability and the peace; it believes that the region can and should be an area of cooperation and security [4, Antyushina N.M., pp. 54–61]. The President of Finland Sauli Niinistö declared that during the two-year AC chairmanship, Finland could mitigate the global political situation by hosting a summit with the presence of the US and Russian leaders<sup>7</sup>.

The country acknowledges the existence of real threats to the vulnerable Arctic environment; it gives priority to the development of maritime navigation and infrastructure, supports the participation of indigenous peoples in international cooperation.

Finland is sympathetic to the interests, strategies and policies of the Arctic States and it is carefully watching their actions. At the end of 2016, Canada and the USA banned the issuance of licenses for offshore drilling. Norway focuses on research and training of qualified personnel to use the resources effectively. Priorities of the Danish-Greenlandic policy in the Arctic are energy and mining, and conservation of nature. Iceland is occupied with the development of transport in the Arctic, shipping but air connections, opposes militarization of the Arctic beyond national jurisdiction.

Finland, like other Nordic countries, while recognizing the successes of Russia in the development in the Arctic [5, Zhuravel V.P., pp. 30–36], records the increase in its military presence in

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<sup>6</sup> Finlyandiya predstavila programmu svoego predsedatel'stva v Arkticheskoy sovete. [Finland presented its plan for the AC chairmanship]. URL: <http://ru.uarctic.org/novosti/2017/5/finlyandiya-predstavila-programmu-svoego-predsedatel'stva-v-arkticheskoy-sovete/> (Accessed: 12 May 2017) [in Russian]; SShA peredali Finlyandii predsedatel'stvo v Arkticheskoy sovete. [The USA passed the AC chairmanship to Finland] 16.05.2017. URL: <http://www.da-voda.com/news/ssha-peredali-finlyandii-predsedatel'stvo-v-arkticheskoy-sovete/> (Accessed: 18 May 2017) [in Russian]

<sup>7</sup> Arkticheskaya povestka Finlyandii porodnit Rossiyu i SShA [Arctic issues will relate the USA and Russia]. URL: <http://geo-politica.info/arkticheskaya-povestka-finlyandii-porodnit-rossiyu-i-ssha.html> (Accessed: 4 April 2017) [in Russian]

the Arctic with anxiety. However, the analysis shows that the level of militarization of the Arctic is not beyond the limits of reasonable sufficiency. All charges in the Russian militarization of the Arctic are groundless. According to the head of Department of Disarmament and Conflict Resolution of the Center for International security at the RAS National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations named after E.M. Primakov, A.V. Zagorsky: "Despite the worsening of relations between Russia and West, the overall situation in the Arctic remains stable and predictable, and the agenda for regional cooperation — constructive. Until recently, the Arctic has been one of the few regions where cooperation was not sacrificed to the current deterioration of Russia's relations with the United States and other Western countries. However, the medium and long term international risks in the region may increase in case of further political tension in Russia's relations with the West" [6, Zagorskiy A.V., p. 102]. This position had been repeatedly expressed by participants of the international scientific forum "The Arctic — Territory of Dialogue" held in March 2017 in Arkhangelsk.

Our country takes some steps for the deployment of military infrastructure aimed at protecting Russia's national interests, contribute to the balance of forces in the region. It is important now to restore military contacts, to reduce suspicion, to avoid misunderstandings between NATO and Russia.

### ***The position of Russia at the meeting in Fairbanks***

At the international meeting of the AC in Fairbanks, Russia clearly outlined its position on the AC activities and current international cooperation<sup>8</sup>.

First, according to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov, all the problems that may arise in the Arctic should be resolved through political negotiations in full compliance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982). He noted that Russia had done much and would do even more to the Arctic development as an area of peace, stability and cooperation. He expressed the idea that there were no potential conflicts and the international law could reliably ensure the national interests of the Arctic states responsible for the long-term development of the far North.

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<sup>8</sup> Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannyh del Rossii S.V. Lavrova na ministerskoj vstreche Arkticheskogo soveta [The speech of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov at the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council], Fairbanks, 11 May 2017. URL: [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2752051](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2752051) (Accessed: 13 May 2017) [in Russian]; Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI Ministra inostrannyh del Rossii S.V. Lavrova po itogam uchastiya v rabote ministerskoj vstrechi Arkticheskogo soveta [The speech and answers to the questions of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov after the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council], Fairbanks, 11 May 2017. URL: [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2752061](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2752061) (Accessed: 13 May 2017) [in Russian]



Secondly, Sergey Lavrov stressed that the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation was relevant to the objectives of conservation, adaptation to climate change, the establishment of a regular system of exchange between the arctic scientists, as well as economic development. The Minister was sure that the Agreement also met the needs and helped the improvement of the living conditions of the indigenous peoples and all the other residents of the far North. In his opinion, this Agreement would give an additional index of the joint research work of scientists of all countries.

Thirdly, in terms of security in the Arctic, he proposed to return to the previous practice of annual meetings of chiefs of the armed forces of the Arctic States that had facilitated the strengthening of trust and understanding between states.

Fourth, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation confirmed that Russia — the biggest Arctic power would continue to contribute to the resilience to global challenges, the implementation of the UN document “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, expansion of mutually beneficial economic ties, development of cooperation in the framework of the AC in the field of telecommunications and activities of the Arctic Economic Council.

Fifth, successful development of cooperation is impossible without strengthening of its resource capabilities, and the value which belongs to the AC support of projects, allowing to use new technological solutions and to implement environmental initiatives, including reducing emissions of black carbon, the elimination of accumulated governmental industrial waste.

Sixthly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergey Lavrov invited the Arctic partners to cooperate in the implementation of the Russian program of economic development of the Arctic in combination with environmental protection, measures to improve the quality of life and support of indigenous culture and traditions as well as the culture of the other residents of the North.

### ***Conclusion***

The AC meeting in Fairbanks strengthened the foundation of the peaceful cooperation in the Arctic. This region has a huge economic potential. Its future should not become a subject of controversy or conflict among the Arctic states. Russia proceeds from the fact that there are no reasons for conflict there. In addition, peaceful cooperation in the Arctic has a solid international legal basis.

Russia is open to international cooperation in the region. The most important issues in the Arctic are, of course, peace and sustainable development of all the Arctic territories, as well as



large-scale environmental interventions in the context of human activities in this highly vulnerable, from an ecological point of view, area of the planet.

There is a confidence that the Finnish chairmanship of the AC, with the account of its long experience of working in the Arctic, will be successful and productive. The country had important achievements in environmental protection. In addition, Finland, being a neutral state with great authority in the Arctic Council, will try to contribute to the mitigation of international tension between the leading world countries. It is necessary to consider the fact that the US President Donald Trump has proposed to cut funds for environmental and climate research.

Finland and Russia have much in common on the Arctic track. It might become an impetus for the further strengthening of Russian-Finnish relations. Currently, Russia ranks third after Germany and Sweden among Finland's trading partners. Since 2014, we observed the decrease in turnover (more than two times: from \$18 in 2014 to \$9 billion in 2016). It stopped last year. In January — February 2017, the trade volume grew by 58% (\$1.8 billion). Investments and cooperation are also stable. In the summer 2016, the amount of accumulated direct Finnish investments in Russia amounted to \$3.7 billion, Russian in Finland — \$2.7 billion. Currently, the Russian market has over 400 Finnish firms. About seven thous Finnish companies directly or indirectly trade with Russia. In Finland, there are about three thous companies with Russian capital, mainly in the field of trade, mediation, consulting, tourism, transport and logistics. High activity of different mutual trips of Russians and Finns. The number of Russian-Finnish border crossing is very impressive. It reduced from 13 million in 2013 (a record number) to 8.8 million in 2016<sup>9</sup> but it is still impressive. In July 2017, the Finish Ministry of Economy and Labour agreed to the construction of the “Nord Stream 2” gas pipeline in the territorial waters of Suomi in March 2018.<sup>10</sup>

In 2017, the cooperation between our countries takes place under the sign of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the state independence of Finland.

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<sup>9</sup> Kommentarij Departamenta informacii i pečati MID Rossii v svyazi s vizitom v Finlyandiyu Ministra ino-strannyx del Rossii S.V. Lavrova. [Review of the MFA of Russia Department for Information and Press in connection with the visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia S. V. Lavrov to Finland]. 3.05.2017 r. URL: [http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2743105](http://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2743105) (Accessed: 13 May 2017) [in Russian]

<sup>10</sup> Poghosyan A. Finlyandiya daet zelyonyj svet “Severnomu potoku-2” [Poghosyan A. Finland gives the green light “Nord Stream-2”]. *Izvestiya*. 2017. 13 July. [in Russian]

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