

The Arctic – what’s at stake?

Nordic security conference, Vilnius 19 March 2021

For several years, the Nordic embassies and Nordic Council of Ministers in Vilnius have organized a yearly security conference together with Lithuanian partners. In this dialogue, it has been decided to focus on the Arctic Region this year. It is a very topical subject as the EU is presently elaborating an Arctic strategy. Secondly, the Nordic countries have recently elaborated new Arctic strategies or are in the process of doing so. Nordic Council of Ministers’ Arctic Program runs out at the end of 2021, and climate change is among the highest shared priorities. Finally, Estonia and Latvia have recently expressed their interest in joining the Arctic Council as observers. The current Chair of the Arctic Council is Iceland, followed by Russia from May onwards.

The objective of the conference is to present to a Lithuanian audience the different important issues that are at stake in general, for the EU and for the Nordic countries in the Arctic region in particular. These are issues that might also be of growing importance to Lithuania and the other Baltic states. This includes both hard and soft security (search and rescue) questions, as well as issues related to the vulnerable environment and climate (including black carbon emissions), resource management (including fisheries and energy), new transportation routes, economic development, and social issues (of especially the indigenous people) etc.

Russia’s military build-up in the region and China’s pressure to play a role as a “near Arctic country” are often highlighted as drivers for a more intense political climate. The US is also stepping up its engagement in the region. Despite strong differences with Russia over Ukraine/Crimea etc., the Arctic region has witnessed a good level of practical cooperation on several of the mentioned areas, including people-to-people contacts. The Arctic Council plays a key role in defining the Arctic governance, but other (major) players and multilateral frameworks influence the region and the political development. The EU and the upcoming EU Arctic strategy could and should play a facilitating role in ensuring strong cooperation ties and international legal regulations.

10:00 // Opening of the conference.

- **Arnoldas Pranckevičius**, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania
- **Michael Mann**, European Union Special Envoy for Arctic Matters, European External Action Service.

ORGANISERS OF THE CONFERENCE:



Norwegian Embassy



EMBASSY OF DENMARK
Vilnius

10:15 // First panel: “Stronger Together: Cooperation in Pursuit of Green Politics and Sustainable Economy in the Arctic Region”

The panel will focus on the current situation in the region, possible wider cooperation in the context of European Union, issues related to the vulnerable environment and climate, resource management, new transportation routes, economic development, and social issues.

- **Tómas Orri Ragnarsson**, Senior Adviser, Secretariat for the Arctic Expert Committee, Nordic Council of Ministers
- **Louise Calais**, Ambassador for Arctic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden
- **Rune Jensen**, Coordinator - White Paper on the Arctic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway
- **Viktorija Rusinaitė**, Senior Analyst at Hybrid CoE, associated analyst at Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis

Moderator: Dr. Margarita Šešelgytė, Director of the Institute of the International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University

11:30 // Break

11:45 // Second panel: “Between East and West: Competition and Cooperation in the Arctic Region”

The panel will focus on the future of the region, possible cooperation, and competition between EU and NATO countries, Russia, and China. How to find a balance between competition, different interests and possible opportunities to cooperate? What are the main security challenges?

- **Matti Anttonen**, Permanent State Secretary, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
- **Thomas Winkler**, Ambassador for Arctic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark
- **Saulius Gasiūnas**, Director of the Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Department, Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania
- **Friðrik Jónsson**, Iceland’s Senior Arctic Official to the Arctic Council

Moderator: Prof. Mindaugas Jurkynas, Head of the Department of Political science, Vytautas Magnus University, Jean Monnet Chair

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