

REVIEW OF ARCTIC POLICY OF FINLAND IN 2010S

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Abstract: Finland is one of the main actors in Arctic international relations. It has managed to influence the development of the region by means of its Arctic policy, transmitted through Arctic Council and other regional organizations. This article studies the history of development of the current Finnish Arctic policy and its main clauses. In the third part of the article the Finnish Arctic Strategy 2013 is compared to the Swedish one, published in 2020. As a result of the comparison, Finnish Strategy is found still quite relevant. In the fourth part the author examines the results of the implementation of Finnish Arctic policy and states that it has been comparatively successful.

Keywords: Arctic policy, Arctic strategy, Arctic States, Finland, Arctic Council, Northern Dimension

Finland is one of the eight Arctic States. From the perspective of international law, Finland was for the first time referred to as an Arctic State in 1991, when the governments of the USSR, Finland, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States signed the Declaration on the Protection of Arctic Environment (1991 Rovaniemi Declaration) and the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy [1]. These international legal acts launched the so called Rovaniemi process, which was intended to gradually intensify cooperation in the region [2]. As a result, the Arctic Council (AC) was established in 1996. The Declaration on the Establishment of the AC (1996 Ottawa Declaration) confirmed the Arctic State status of Finland [3].

It is worth mentioning that it was Finland that initiated the Rovaniemi process [2]. This indicates that already in the 1990s the state clearly positioned itself as an independent actor capable of influencing future development of the Arctic.

Acknowledging the country's active role in shaping the international legal regime in the region in 1990s and 2000s, we should, however, note that Finland's Arctic policy of that period cannot be called fully consistent and independent from other state policies. While at the beginning of 1990s the Arctic itself was of considerable interest to Finland, by the end of the decade the focus of Finland's foreign policy had shifted and the

Arctic agenda, although still quite important for the country's authorities, had been superseded by the Northern Dimension initiative — a project with a greater geographic scope. In its framework Finnish policy in the Arctic developed in 2000s [2].

By the end of 2000s both Arctic and non-Arctic States' interest towards the region had surged, prompted by such factors as globalization, rise in the prices of natural resources in the 2000s, accelerating pace of climate change, and recognition of the Arctic's new transportation role. This resulted in a "boom" of publishing of Arctic strategies — between 2009 and 2013 such documents were developed and issued by all member states of the AC [5].

First Arctic strategy of Finland (hereinafter referred to as the 2010 Strategy) [7] was released by the government of Mari Kiviniemi in July 2010. Its objectives included protecting the environment, developing the region's economy and transportation system, involving indigenous peoples in decision-making process, enhancing the role of regional international organizations, and strengthening the presence of the EU in the Arctic. It is important to note that a distinctive feature of the 2010 Strategy is that it was designed to deal mostly with foreign policy issues.

The 2010 strategy was in force for a relatively short time — until 2013. At the end of 2012, it became clear that there was a

need to update and expand its content. This was due to the rapidly growing international importance of the Arctic region and partial reorientation of Finland's development vector towards the north [8].

In August 2013, the government of Jyrki Katainen published a new, currently effective Finland's Arctic Strategy (hereinafter referred to as the 2013 Strategy). In essence, it is a more comprehensive version of the 2010 strategy, which takes into account both foreign and domestic development priorities of the country. The main objective was to stimulate economic growth and increase the competitiveness of the region with due regard for the environmental constraints.

Table 1 summarises the key objectives of the 2013 Strategy, divided into six blocks¹: economy, international cooperation, social sphere, science, environment and security. While making up the table, the author paid attention mainly to the objectives

¹ The clustering of the objectives is made by the author for ease of analysis. The way the objectives are divided into blocks in the 2013 Strategy is different.

that are important from the international perspective.

The following measures are foreseen for the implementation of the 2013 Strategy: improvement of legislative regulation; provision of public funding; involvement of expert community; expansion of the scale of the activities, carried out by specialised agencies; active participation in international organisations; development of additional control mechanisms, etc.

It should be noted that the 2013 Strategy was generally in line with the Arctic strategies of the other AC member states. The differences may seem quite significant when comparing the strategies pairwise, but in essence, the main objectives and activities of all the eight Arctic States during the period under review are same [5].

In 2016-2017, the government of Juha Sipilä updated the 2013 Strategy. It did not make any sweeping changes, but only refined Finland's strategic priorities [9]. In addition, the update slightly shifted the



Figure 1: Arctic Council: Member States and Permanent Observers as of September 2019 Source - Arctic Portal: https://arcticportal.org/images/news/2019/Arctic_Council_members_and_observers_2019.jpg

emphasis in the foreign policy block of objectives, highlighting the need to link the Arctic issues and the problems of the Nordic countries in general.

The 2016-2017 update currently remains the latest revision of Finland's Arctic strategy. In its programme the current government of Sanna Marin [12] indicates the intention to draw up a new Arctic strategy, which would consider Finland's long-term goals and the resources needed to realise them. The publication of this document is scheduled for March 2021.

For a more detailed analysis, it seems relevant to compare the 2013 Strategy (with the adjustments made in 2016-2017) with the new Arctic Strategy of Sweden [13]. The main reason for this is that the Sweden's Arctic Strategy was released only in September 2020. Therefore, a comparison with it — taking into account its previous version [14] — will allow for an approximate assessment of how relevant the 2013 Strategy is at the moment.

The comparison suggests that the 2013

Strategy is still quite relevant in general and reflects key trends in the development of the Arctic region. The only aspect in which Finland's current Arctic Strategy is clearly outdated is its understanding of the current geopolitical situation (for example, the Swedish 2020 Strategy places much more emphasis on military issues, which have only become relevant in the last few years). However, it is difficult to call this a fundamental shortcoming – geopolitical factor is changing very dynamically, which cannot be promptly reflected in strategic documents.

To conclude, let us briefly describe the results of the implementation of Finland's Arctic policy in 2010s. They are most clearly seen when we study Finland's chairmanship in the AC in 2017-2019. Its results [15] can be used as a first approximation to assess how successful Finland's Arctic policy was in general.

The main achievements of Finland's two-year chairmanship belong to the fields of environmental protection, digital

Table 1.

Key objectives of the 2013 Strategy

Block	Generalised objectives
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Increase the international competitiveness of Finland's traditional export sectors (Arctic shipbuilding, clean technologies in mining and energy sectors, Arctic tourism, etc.), taking into account the changes taking place in the Arctic climate · Develop the infrastructure in the Finnish Arctic · Promote sustainable use of natural resources
International cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Intensify contacts with neighbouring countries in the field of common transport infrastructure · Increase cooperation within regional organisations (especially the AC and BEAC), Northern Dimension policy, bilateral partnerships and at subregional level · Improve Finland's international image as an Arctic State · Promote EU policy in the Arctic
Social sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Improve the quality of life and working conditions of residents of the Finnish Arctic · Preserve and develop indigenous cultures
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Expand the scope and the range of Arctic research and education programmes · Participate in international scientific and technological cooperation on the issues related to the Arctic
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Respect the environmental limits of the Arctic region, take into account the risks associated with the active presence of human and the need to prevent pollution in all activities carried out by Finland in the Arctic · Integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives into Finnish international cooperation projects · Develop methods to assess and manage the risks associated with global warming
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Promote peaceful conflict resolution in the Arctic through regional organisations · Develop professional skills of rescuers and military personnel serving in the Arctic · Strengthen international defence cooperation, particularly by organizing joint exercises

infrastructure and education. The projects implemented in these areas are in line with the updated 2013 Strategy. Finland's international cooperation initiatives were also successful in a number of respects.

However, the political tensions between the AC members did affect the outcome of Finland's chairmanship. For example, the AC ministerial meeting on 7 May 2019 did not adopt a joint declaration – for the first time in the history of the AC. This was largely due to the United States' tough stance against inclusion of environmental agenda issues into the declaration. Also the AC's Strategic Plan of Action was not approved, and the idea of the Arctic Summit at the Head of State level failed, too.

Because of this facts we cannot suggest that Finland's Arctic policy of the period under review was a complete success. However, it must be acknowledged that, at least in 2017-2019, its implementation was largely successful.

To sum up, Finland's Arctic policy in the 2010s was comprehensive, flexible and progressive, responding to the main challenges of the decade. Its future development is likely to involve the strengthening of the environmental pillar as well as the increased role of security and defence issues while retaining its main features and priorities. One thing that is absolutely certain is that in the future Finland will not relinquish its status of an active player in the Arctic region.



Figure 2. Collective photo of participants at the AC ministerial meeting on 7 May 2019 Source - Rossiyskaya Gazeta: <https://rg.ru/2019/05/07/v-finliandii-otkrylas-ministerskaia-vstrecha-arkticheskogo-soveta.html>

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