

*Metaphysics is like being in a dark room and  
looking for a black cat that isn't there.*

## **LOOKING AT NORTHERN LIGHTS: A (NON) EXISTENT ARCTIC IN LITHUANIA**

*Mindaugas Jurkynas*

### **Introduction**

Arctic or “High North” related issues comprise of a metaphysical quest in Lithuania.<sup>1</sup> Soul-searching for the polar profile or traces of it in Lithuanian politics, economics, science and media is reminiscent of a leap into the great unknown. Lithuania is relatively far from this region geographically and mentally. Arguably, the Baltic States, according to the UN geographical distribution of the world, belong to Northern Europe, but it is, perhaps, the farthest one can go towards the Arctic in this eastern Baltic Sea sub-region. No famous Lithuanian travellers or scientists, let alone businesses, have had barely anything to do with the Circumpolar North. Naturally, politics and economics are in a similar same vein so far. No identity narratives in Lithuania engulfs the Arctic into feelings of togetherness, except perhaps Soviet-led deportations

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of thousands of Lithuanians to Siberia and its areas close to the Arctic Ocean. Dominating regional identities in Lithuania possess Baltic and Northern European character<sup>2</sup> which hinge mostly upon (ontological) security concerns and a “good riddance” of post-Soviet legacies.<sup>3</sup> The Arctic is overwhelmingly associated with distance, cold, and the North Pole. It has been socially, economically and politically natural to see the Circumpolar North in that way, although lately the Arctic has turned into a political and economic hot-spot with a breeding yearn for a hydrocarbon bonanza. Undiscovered fossil fuels, according to US geological survey estimates comprise around 20 percent of the global total<sup>4</sup> and even today the High North provides about one tenth of the world’s oil and a quarter of its gas.<sup>5</sup> Global warming tangibly defrosts summer sea ice cap. This might bring forth valuable commodities in an Arctic Ocean, such as new fishing territories, increased accessibility to oil, gas, mining and even the growing potential for tourism. If ships could conveniently navigate through an ice-free north-west passage in the polar area, commercial use would boom by bringing goods to customers in Asia much faster than voyaging other ways. All this comes hand in hand with subsequently increased political attention among the countries of the Arctic region and beyond, thus unravelling a new and previously unseen vortex of geopolitical games. As major powers in this northern region gear up to explore the Arctic and sub-Arctic, el dorado type conflicts might arise. The inevitability of a polar race or conflict cannot be ruled

<sup>2</sup> Jurkynas, Mindaugas (2007), *How Deep is Your Love: Baltic Brotherhood Re-examined* (2007), Vilnius, Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.

<sup>3</sup> Mälksoo, Maria (2006). From Existential Politics Towards Normal Politics? The Baltic States in the Enlarged Europe, *Security Dialogue* Vol. 37, No. 3, September 2006.

<sup>4</sup> 90 Billion Barrels of Oil and 1,670 Trillion Cubic Feet of Natural Gas Assessed in the Arctic, July 23, 2008, <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980#Ux1bcD-Sx9U>.

<sup>5</sup> Wheeler, Sara (2009), *The Magnetic North: Notes from the Arctic Circle*, Jonathan Cape.

out, since unfinished business of defining national frontiers looms on the horizon. The United Nations received some applications concerning territorial claims to Arctic territories from several interested countries in 2014.<sup>6</sup>

Lithuanian media usually pricks its antennae up whenever Russia’s military involvement falls into limelight. The littoral Arctic Ocean, so called Arctic-5, has countries claiming ownership of the potential benefits in what lies deep down in the Arctic Ocean, more specifically, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the United States. Russia and Canada were the very first to voice their Arctic shares. In 2007 Russia embedded a titanium flag in the polar depths in the seabed below the ice, though that spot might go to Denmark, and started a sabre-rattling by boosting its military presence in the Arctic. In September 2013, Russian military and support vessels re-established a presence on a former airfield closed in 1993, on Kotelný Island and plans to establish a joint Northern fleet strategic command centre for the defence of Russian interests in the region are on the way.<sup>7</sup> Canadians vehemently oppose Russian claims by asserting Canadian sovereignty over the North Pole and tensions over the Circumpolar North are latently simmering.<sup>8</sup> Other Arctic NATO members are up-and-going too. Denmark established its Arctic command in Greenland and acquired new inspection vessels; Norway moved its operational army headquarters

<sup>6</sup> The UN Commission on Continental Shelf has approved the Norwegian application to extend its shelf in 2009. Denmark has filed its application in November 2013 and so did Canada in December 2013. Russia is working on the second application (the first one was rejected by the Commission in 2001) and will probably file it in 2014 or 2015. The U.S. has no right to apply for the extension of its continental shelf, as she did not ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982).

<sup>7</sup> Rusija Arktyje kurs naują karinę struktūrą, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/world/rusija-arktyje-kurs-nauja-karine-struktura.d?id=64042762>.

<sup>8</sup> Russia to boost military presence in Arctic as Canada plots North Pole claim, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/russia-military-arctic-canada-north-pole>.

northwards to Bodo in 2009 and are considering a greater involvement of their armed forces in the north; Canada has invested into Arctic transport infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, all this military hurly-burly is slightly overplayed, since limited modernisation of a built up military is actually under way.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter sheds light on Arctic factor in Lithuania's politics with a study based on primary sources of information such as governmental and party programmes, legal documents, interviews conducted among diplomats, ministerial officers, professionals and high-ranking officials. One must admit that research on Lithuania's relations or interests in the High North has been up to this point absent, However it does not imply invisibility of a polar discourse. Vytautas Sirijos Gira in his policy paper researched the relevance of the Arctic for Russian foreign policy, touching briefly upon the importance of Arctic issues and geopolitical contention for the Baltic States.<sup>11</sup> Russia's interest in the Arctic has been also analysed by Giedrius Premeneckas and Mindaugas Vezbergas<sup>12</sup>. Dovilė Šukytė inspected legal, political and geopolitical interests of states in the polar region and Giedrius Kviklys investigated the role of the Arctic in Russian–Norwegian relations. Further more, Inga Bankauskaitė delved

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, Page (2013) *'Between a Rock and a Cold Place? NATO and the Arctic*, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/28/between-a-rock-and-a-cold-place-nato-and-the-arctic>.

<sup>10</sup> Wezeman, Siemon T (2012), Military capabilities in the Arctic, Sipri background paper, March 2012, [http://books.sipri.org/product\\_info?c\\_product\\_id=442#](http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=442#).

<sup>11</sup> Sirijos Gira, Vytautas (2010), *Arkties reikšmė Rusijos užsienio politikoje: kodėl Arkties klausimai aktualūs ir Baltijos šalims*, [http://www.eesc.lt/uploads/news/id278/Rytu%20pulsas%201%20\(29\).pdf](http://www.eesc.lt/uploads/news/id278/Rytu%20pulsas%201%20(29).pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Premeneckas, Giedrius (2013) *Rusijos Arkties politika: galios projekcija ar bendradarbiavimas?*, Jonas Žemaitis Lithuanian Military Academy, Vezbergas, Mindaugas (2011), *Naujos geopolitinės tendencijos Šiaurės ašigalyje: Rusijos Arkties strategija ir iššūkiai*, Vilnius University, Institute of International Relations and Political Science.

into the comparison of US and Canadian positions in the High North<sup>13</sup> and Rimvydas Ragauskas pondered the rationale for international cooperation in the Arctic.<sup>14</sup> His policy papers at the think-tank of geopolitics, and similar articles from other authors, returned to the role of Russia and Arctic Council related topics.<sup>15</sup> After international media adjusted their telescopes towards the High North in recent years, Lithuanian journalists followed suit. The Arctic's role for Lithuania has not stirred much attention, however, running headlines about the High North has spread information about increased competition for Arctic resources, new transport routes, environmental aspects and in particular Russia's interests in the North.<sup>16</sup>

This chapter will take stock of the Arctic profile in Lithuanian foreign, security and domestic policies. Firstly, the analysis will look for polar topics in “Northern” perceptions among key political actors. Secondly, it will establish the country's attitudes towards the High North in multilateral frameworks. Thirdly, sector-oriented interests in the Arctic, or, perhaps their lack, will be presented. And finally, bearing interest compatibility in mind, main High North-related issues will be mapped out looking at Lithuanian partnerships with Latvia, Estonia and Poland, followed by concluding statements.

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<sup>13</sup> Bankauskaitė, Inga (2012), *Arkties klausimas Šiaurės regiono valstybių politikoje. JAV ir Kanados pozicijų palyginimas*, Kaunas, Vytautas Magnus University.

<sup>14</sup> Šukytė, Dovilė (2010), *Ginčas dėl Arkties teritorijų: teisiniai, politiniai ir geopolitiniai valstybių interesai*, Vilnius University, Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Kviklys, Giedrius (2010), *Teritorijos svarba šiuolaikinėje tarptautinėje politikoje: Arkties vaidmuo Rusijos–Norvegijos santykiuose*, Vytautas Magnus University Ragauskas, Rimvydas (2012), *Kas skatina Arkties valstybių bendradarbiavimą: kompleksinis požiūris į Arkties regioną*, Vilnius University, Institute of International Relations and Political Science.

<sup>15</sup> Geopolitika.lt – Arktis, <http://geopolitika.lt/?q=arktis&image.x=0&image.y=0>

<sup>16</sup> DELFI – Arktis, <http://www.delfi.lt/temos/arktis>; lrytas.lt – Arktis, [http://www.lrytas.lt/search\\_rez.asp](http://www.lrytas.lt/search_rez.asp).

## Arctic, where are you?

Whereas China describes herself as a 'near-Arctic' country,<sup>17</sup> Polar issues are almost a political *terra incognita* in Lithuania. Programmes of governments and political parties, political statements, interviews with the president, prime minister, and other high ranking officials perhaps unsurprisingly reveal non-existent or even nascent interest from Lithuania regarding the polar region. The main foreign policy issues are, echoed in the country's EU Council presidency priorities for July-December 2013, energy security,<sup>18</sup> and EU Eastern Partnership and Transatlantic relations. The closest action pertaining to the Circumpolar North scene is intensifying Nordic-Baltic cooperation, despite certain differences in security orientations, welfare or social attitudes, and policies.<sup>19</sup>

The President in Lithuania, according to the Constitution's Article 84.1, decides the basic issues of foreign policy and conducts foreign policy with the government.<sup>20</sup> After Dalia Grybauskaitė became president in 2009, she has been moving towards increasing 'Baltoscandian' interdependence.<sup>21</sup> Whether it was as a fad at the expense of lukewarm Lithuanian-Polish relations remains to be seen, but the president has been firmly bolstering Lithuania's northern orientation. Correspondingly, the country's foreign minister Linas Linkevičius said on May 16,

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<sup>17</sup> Bloomfield, Steve (2013), In from the Cold – Arctic Circle, *Monocle*, November 2013, Issue 68, volume 07.

<sup>18</sup> However, the Arctic role has not yet been considered at the Ministry of Energy, Interview with the Minister of Energy, Jaroslav Neverovič, January 30, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Jurkynas, Mindaugas (2014), Security Concerns of the Baltic States in the 21st century (2014), in Clive Archer, Alyson JK Bailes and Anders Wivel, eds, *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*, London, Routledge.

<sup>20</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www3.lrs.lt/home/Konstitucija/Constitution.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> This was a different standpoint compared to her predecessor, Valdas Adamkus' proclivity for a Lithuania's role as an active centre for regional initiatives.

2013 that: "Lithuanian foreign policy had two wings - the Nordic and the Polish - and a good flight needed both."<sup>22</sup>

The programmes from the two previous governments say nothing of the Arctic, instead Nordic-Baltic relations come to light. The Conservative-led right-of-centre government during 2008-2012 foresaw<sup>23</sup> dense political Nordic-Baltic cooperation with an aim to represent common interests in NATO, the EU and beyond. The Nordic-Baltic cooperations were in the fields of energy and creating a common electricity market (NordPool), as well as closer collaboration in security and defence contributing to Euro-Atlantic security and development of cooperation in the E-PINE format.

After the parliamentary election in 2012, a new left-of-centre and Social Democrats-steered coalition government consisting of Social Democrats, the Labour Party, the Order and Justice Party and Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania, did not distance themselves from the aforementioned attitudes by viewing Lithuania as part of the Baltic (Sea) region. Foreign policy is now primarily looking towards the Nordic and Baltic States due to close political, economic and energy-related interests. Moreover, the Nordic-Baltic dimension is complemented by the inclusion of the UK into this regional collaboration. The programme foresees an important role through the Nordic and Baltic electricity energy market for Lithuanian energy independence.<sup>24</sup>

Though all mainstream political organisations in the country stay nonchalant towards the Arctic, nonetheless, a 'Northern European' discourse grows stronger. The only politician who took an interest in po-

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<sup>22</sup> VDU lankėsi LR užsienio reikalų ministras, Vytautas Magnus University, <http://www.vdu.lt/lt/universitete-lankysis-lr-uzsienio-reikalu-ministras>.

<sup>23</sup> Nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės Programos, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, December 9, 2008, [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=333778&p\\_query=&p\\_tr2=](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=333778&p_query=&p_tr2=).

<sup>24</sup> Nutarimas dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės Programos, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, December 13, 2012, [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=439761](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=439761).

lar questions is a member of the Parliament, Mr. Emanuelis Zingeris from the Conservative party. Close to preaching doom-and-gloom about maturing rivalry for Arctic resources, he called for closer Lithuanian involvement into High North policies via Nordic-Baltic cooperation, by proposing the inclusion of Arctic issues among Lithuanian priorities for the country's presidency at the Council of the EU.<sup>25</sup>

Otherwise, the issues of the north can be subsumed to the Nordic region. Among political parties in Lithuania the most North-oriented players are the Conservatives and the Social Democrats. Though the latest Conservative party programme marginally mentioned Scandinavian partnership for the interconnection of electricity markets,<sup>26</sup> party leaders such as former Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius, or ex-foreign minister Audronius Ažubalis, remain unequivocally outspoken supporters of Lithuania's Nordic orientation.<sup>27</sup> The Social Democrats, in turn, consider the relevance of the Nordic Investment Bank, cooperation with the Baltic region, the Nordic states, Poland and Germany and aim at strengthening Lithuania's influence in the EU, in particular Baltic-Nordic collaboration in the spheres of economy, scientific and technological innovations, transport, energy, climate change, ecology, security and defence.<sup>28</sup> The Liberal Movement "supports cooperation with Baltic Sea Region's and Northern European Countries", yet does not elaborate on 'nordicness' further.<sup>29</sup> The Labour Party intends to "amplify closer relations with countries of the Baltic Sea and Northern European regions for

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Emanuelis Zingeris, the member of the Conservative party at the Lithuanian Parliament, February 6, 2014.

<sup>26</sup> TS-LKD Programa, [http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/ts\\_lkd\\_programa/2650](http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/ts_lkd_programa/2650).

<sup>27</sup> A. Kubilius. Lietuvos minkštoji geopolitika – kodėl su skandinavais? <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/a-kubilius-lietuvos-minkstoji-geopolitika-kodel-su-skandinavais.d?id=63826944>; A. Ažubalis. Bunda jau Baltoskandija <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/aazubalis-bunda-jau-baltoskandija.d?id=49288886>.

<sup>28</sup> LSDP Partijos programa, <http://lsdp.lt/apie-partija/programos/partijos-programa>.

<sup>29</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Liberalų Sąjūdžio programa "Laisvė kurti", <http://www.liberalai.lt/lt/partija/programa-laisve-kurti>.

the development of projects related to transport, road, railway, airport and seaport, energy and other interstate fields"<sup>30</sup>. The other two parties of the ruling coalition, the Order and Justice,<sup>31</sup> and the Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles<sup>32</sup> do not have any references about Northern Europe, never mind the Arctic in their most recent 2012 parliamentary election programmes.

## Lithuania and Arctic: issues in multilateral frameworks

Lithuanian positions towards the High North were formulated in the past within regional organisations as Arctic *problématique* virtually does not manifest in bilateral meetings, in the Nordic-Baltic region or beyond. In 2009 Vilnius responded to the Communiqué of the European Commission, adopted in 2008.<sup>33</sup> Lithuanian position accentuates a close and unique linking between the EU and Arctic in areas of history, geography, economy, and scientific discoveries. The EU policy is attached to the High North in soft security areas like environment, climate change, energy, research and development, transport, fisheries and the like. Lithuania supports an active EU Arctic policy, since environmental changes spark geostrategic dynamics in the Arctic and this can affect international stability and security interests in Europe. Alongside this Lithuania backed

<sup>30</sup> Darbo partijos rinkimų į 2012–2016 m. Lietuvos Respublikos Seimą programa, <http://www.darbobartija.lt/rinkimai-2012/programa-2012/#uzsienio-politika-ir-nacionalinis-saugumas>.

<sup>31</sup> Partijos Tvarka ir Teisingumas programa "Trečioji Respublika", <http://www.tvarka.lt/index.php?id=7293>.

<sup>32</sup> Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija, Programa, [http://www.awpl.lt/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=57&lang=lt](http://www.awpl.lt/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=57&Itemid=57&lang=lt).

<sup>33</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 'The EU and the Arctic Region', <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:DKEY=483680:EN:NOT>.

up Communiqué's aims and action plan by noting political relevance of Northern Dimension's Transport and Logistics Partnership in the Baltic Sea region and cooperation with Russia in the fields of land transport. Lithuania participates in a general EU Arctic policy, however, during her presidency at the Council of the EU, Arctic issues were not singled out.<sup>34</sup>

Lithuania as a member of the EU, and an array of regional organisations, adopts passive stances on Arctic issues. Foreign ministry considers the country does not hold a direct and bilateral relation to the Arctic region due to different geopolitical foci, limited human, economic and financial resources and the great distance from the Circumpolar North.<sup>35</sup> Because of mounting interests and competition in the Arctic region the attempt by small states to squeeze in among quite a few countries, is not so cordially received. Despite a lack of direct interest and access to the Arctic, the country, as a member of the European Union, follows developments in the High North and supports a more active role of the EU which has until now not succeeded in becoming an observer at the Arctic Council (AC). The AC was founded in 1996 as an intergovernmental forum for cooperation among Arctic States, with the involvement of Arctic Indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on issues like environmental protection and sustainable development.<sup>36</sup>

During the Swedish AC presidency the Kiruna declaration delayed formal granting of the EU's observer status in 2013: "*The Arctic Coun-*

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with employees at Foreign Ministry, January 2, 2014 and January 7, 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with employees at Foreign Ministry, January 2, 2014 and January 7, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> Member States of the AC are Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the US. The Arctic Council also has Permanent Participants, which are Arctic Athabaskan Council, Aleut International Association, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council, *About the Arctic Council*, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/about-arctic-council>.

*cil receives the application of the EU for observer status affirmatively, but defers a final decision on implementation, until the Council ministers are agreed by consensus that the concerns of Council members [...] are resolved with the understanding that the EU may observe Council proceedings until such time as the Council acts on the letter's proposal*".<sup>37</sup> This meant that the EU could practically attend the AC's meetings but not the working groups, as opposed to China, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore and South Korea which became new observer states. France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and UK were accepted as observers earlier. Ministerial meetings take place twice a year and decisions at the AC are adopted consensually among eight member states.

This far, the AC has rejected the EU's application to join as a permanent observer. Canada and Russia have 'traditionally' opposed the EU's arrival in the AC, as political temperature in the region has risen, and Lithuanian diplomacy did not stand aloof from it by formulating their country's position within the EU. Formally Canada, with the support of Russia, asked to postpone the EU's observer status in 2013 due to unsolved issues regarding the hunting of seals. One of the main values the Arctic Council pursues is protection and representation of indigenous communities in the Arctic. It involves Canadian Inuit whose income also depends on the sales of seal products. However, the EU, with the voice of animal rights protectors, banned imports of Canadian seal products because of cruelty in Canada's seal-hunting industry, allowing only imports of Inuit made produce. This situation led to a plummeting demand for seal-related products - the Inuit in Canada therefore opposed the EU application. Usually, a decision for observer status is adopted during ministerial AC meetings which convene once every two years, but now under a two-year Canadian presidency at the AC, the EU anticipates to resolve remaining issues and gain observer status via a procedure of notification and without separate ministerial approval.

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<sup>37</sup> *Kiruna Declaration: On the Occasion of the Eighth Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council*, May 15, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/05/209405.htm>.

The EU wants to engage more with Arctic partners in order to better know the lay of the land. The EU's Arctic policies since 2008 have rested on three pillars: protection and preservation of the Arctic and its population; promoting sustainable use of resources; and international collaboration. The EU started taking High North issues into account in 2008, when the European Commission adopted its first Communication. The joint Communication adopted in July 2012<sup>38</sup> singled out three main principles towards the Arctic: knowledge, responsibility, engagement. The EU foresees 28 measures directed at enhanced cooperation with Arctic partners, research, climate change, safe technologies, and the indigenous populations.<sup>39</sup> The EU has invested 1.14 billion Euro into Arctic research and sustainable development since 2007.<sup>40</sup> Although observers in the AC do not have a voice in ministerial meetings, nevertheless, financial assistance is a powerful leverage in the decision-making process within the AC too.

Lithuania is interested in the EU's bigger role within the AC as they are the only window to the Arctic region since High North politics are not discussed at Nordic-Baltic meetings of high-ranking officials and politicians.<sup>41</sup> Lithuania has not developed specific Arctic-related interests, and supports common endeavours endorsing environmental management, research, sustainable growth and development in the Arctic region. At the same time, Lithuania does not want rivalries in the Arctic to spin out of control and thereby undermine regional cooperation

<sup>38</sup> Lithuania did not adopt a position on the European Commission's Communication of 2012 and did not object to the Communication of 2008 in 2009, yet the Arctic was not considered a relevant priority back then. Interview with two employees at the Foreign Ministry, February 12, 2014.

<sup>39</sup> EU Arctic Policy [http://eeas.europa.eu/arctic\\_region/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/arctic_region/index_en.htm).

<sup>40</sup> Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, *Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps*, [http://eeas.europa.eu/arctic\\_region/docs/join\\_2012\\_19.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/arctic_region/docs/join_2012_19.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Interview with the Swedish Ambassador to Lithuania Cecilia Ruthström-Ruin, January 8, 2014.

and political stability.<sup>42</sup> The EU is viewed as the best conflict manager and therefore its more visible role in the High North is appreciated and anticipated in Lithuania. The country supports the EU's soft security concerns in the areas of energy, environment, climate change, scientific research, transport, fishing and other hot issues of the Arctic, so a European institutionalised presence opens more doors. Global warming and ensuing environmental changes has triggered a geostrategic revision of the Arctic – all this may affect international stability and European security concerns. Therefore, Lithuania is betting on the EU and its role in international cooperation first of all via the Arctic Council in the North.<sup>43</sup> Lithuania supports the sustainability of European shipyards' competitiveness through the evolving technologies applicable to polar conditions and by building environmentally friendly vessels including ice-breaker ships. On the other hand, Vilnius does not bolster EU Arctic oriented policies which financially burden EU transport policies.<sup>44</sup>

NATO's involvement in the Arctic is tangible yet restrained evidenced by regular military and training exercises, air policing over Iceland, and radar and tracking stations in Greenland, Northern Canada and Alaska, etc. Nevertheless, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said at the North Atlantic Council in May 2013 that 'at this present time, NATO has no intention of raising its presence and activities in the Circumpolar North.'<sup>45</sup> Lithuania follows NATO planning and activities towards the High North, yet keeps a low profile in this regard ready to formulate their position when the stance of NATO

<sup>42</sup> Interview with employees at Foreign Ministry, January 2, 2014 and January 7, 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with the Lithuanian Ambassador to Sweden Eitvydas Bajarūnas January 15, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with an employee at the Ministry of Environment, January 13, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, Page (2013) *'Between a Rock and a Cold Place? NATO and the Arctic*, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/28/between-a-rock-and-a-cold-place-nato-and-the-arctic>.

becomes more clear and more active.<sup>46</sup> Other regional groups like the Northern Dimension, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the EU Baltic Sea Strategy, the E-PINE and the Nordic Future Forum might theoretically have tangents within the Circumpolar North and Lithuania could then link in to the polar region via membership or in relation to the aforementioned bodies and their policies.

The Northern Dimension (ND) is a joint policy launched in 1999 and revamped in 2006 between the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. The ND Policy delivers a platform for dialogue and practical cooperation, strengthening stability and enhanced economic cooperation and integration, competitiveness and sustainable development in Northern Europe. Practical cooperation occurs within the so-called four Partnerships, in the fields of environment, public health and social well-being, transport and logistics, and culture. The ND encompasses an area, “from the European Arctic and sub-Arctic to the southern shores of the Baltic Sea, countries in the vicinity and from north-west Russia in the east, to Iceland and Greenland in the west.”<sup>47</sup> As for the High North, the ministerial meeting of the ND in June 2013 decided that the ND ought not to impose anything on the top of the existing cooperation in the Arctic Council, yet left open perspectives for the Euro-Arctic and Euro-Barents regions. There is a certain division of labour in the North where the EU focuses on the Baltic Sea region, Norway and Ice-

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with an employee at the Ministry of Defence, January 16, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Apart from the key four partners, other parties involved are EU Members States in their national capacities, the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Nordic Investment Bank and the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation, universities, research units, and business community; Canada and the US are observers and Belarus takes part in practical cooperation, *What is the Northern Dimension?* European Union External Action, [http://eeas.europa.eu/north\\_dim/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/north_dim/index_en.htm).

land concentrate on issues related to the High North of the ND.<sup>48</sup> In December 2013, Iceland and Norway have been developing the ND's Euro-Arctic approach which tries to enhance interconnectedness between the ND and the BEAC by focusing on areas of joint interest as transport, logistics, health, culture and environment. Lithuania takes no part in this discussion and generally adheres to positioning themselves as a supporter of an EU-oriented multilateral approach towards the Arctic.<sup>49</sup>

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council is another regional body also dealing with the Arctic issues. BEAC is the organisation for both intergovernmental and interregional cooperation in the Barents Region. It was set up in 1993 in order to stimulate existing cooperation, to take into account new initiatives and proposals and, like in the Arctic Council, to promote sustainable development at large. The area consists of 13 counties in the northernmost parts of Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden; namely Kainuu, Lapland, Oulu, Finmark, Nordland, Troms, Arkhangelsk, Karelia, Komi, Murmansk, Nenets, Norrbotten and Västerbotten, which form the interregional Barents Regional Council. The members of the intergovernmental BEAC are Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission. The chair of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council rotates between Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The Nordic Council of Ministers, the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Arctic Council, and the Northern Dimension coordinate activities at times if necessary.<sup>50</sup> Lithuania is not a member of this organisation and does not emit a greater interest because they receive information via the European Commission.<sup>51</sup>

Again, no Lithuanian interest or strategy towards the Circumpolar North can be traced regarding the Council of the Baltic Sea States

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with an employee at Foreign Ministry, January 7, 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with employees at Foreign Ministry, January 2, 2014 and January 7, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> BEAC, <http://www.beac.st/in-English/Barents-Euro-Arctic-Council>.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with an employee at Foreign Ministry, January 7, 2014.



(CBSS) and EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.<sup>52</sup> The CBSS is a political forum for inter-governmental cooperation, guidance and overall coordination among the riparian Baltic Sea states, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission.<sup>53</sup> The CBSS, however, does not deal with Arctic issues except at the meetings of four regional councils in the North and the Northern Dimension:<sup>54</sup> the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Arctic Council, and the Nordic Council of Ministers. The regional councils represent interests of the sub-regions in the Northern Dimension area and support the implementation of ND projects.<sup>55</sup> Lithuanian presidencies at the CBSS in 1998-1999 and 2009-2010 had no references to the Arctic.<sup>56</sup>

The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region (EUSBSR) is another platform for regional cooperation, including countries from Northern Europe. The EUSBSR as a macro-regional strategy aims at strengthening cooperation and promoting a more balanced development within the region. The strategy contributes to EU policies. The EU Baltic Sea Region covers eight countries (Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). The Strategy focuses on environmental sustainability, prosperity, accessibility, attractiveness, safety, and security. The Strategy was adopted by the European Council in 2009 and brings together initiatives in different sectors and promotes cooperation and networking between various stakeholders in the Baltic Sea Region

<sup>52</sup> Interview with the employee at Foreign Ministry, February 10, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> CBSS, The Council, <http://www.cbss.org/council-2/>

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Deputy Director General of the CBSS Secretariat, Eduardas Borisovas, January 14, 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Regional Councils, the Finnish Foreign Ministry, <http://formin.finland.fi/public/Print.aspx?contentid=247676&nodeid=31917&culture=en-US&contentlan=2>.

<sup>56</sup> Lietuvos pirmininkavimo BJVT gairės, 1998 birželio 23 – 1999 liepos 1 d., <http://www.urm.lt/index.php?887445926>, Lietuvos pirmininkavimas BJVT 2009 liepa – 2010 birželis, <http://www.urm.lt/index.php?4222139296>.

at both a national level and at a macro-regional level.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, the EUSBSR does not take into account polar questions, as in its Action Plan of 2010,<sup>58</sup> and documents and activities followed reveal scant interest in the High North within strategy framework.

The Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (E-PINE) also serves as a platform for ‘northern’ topics. The E-PINE, launched by the US government in 2003, is an offspring of the US North European Initiative, dating back to 1997, which geographically encompasses nine countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and the US) and deals with cooperative security, healthy societies and vibrant economies.<sup>59</sup> However, the main issues that appear on the Lithuanian agenda with E-PINE deal with energy security, transport, EU’s eastern neighbourhood, human rights and democracy.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the Northern Future Forum (NFF), initiated by the UK in 2011, is an annual informal meeting of prime ministers, experts, and entrepreneurs from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden and the UK. The topics discussed under the NFF in 2011-2013 cover everything but Arctic issues: technology and innovation, jobs, family and gender equality, green economy and sustainable business, long-term sustainable growth, involvement of women into top positions and entrepreneurship, senior citizenry in the labour force, competitiveness of green

<sup>57</sup> EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region, What is EUSBSR? <http://www.balticsea-region-strategy.eu/pages/what-is-the-eusbsr>.

<sup>58</sup> “Through its range of projects in water, waste water, solid waste and energy efficiency, this instrument is helping to deliver real benefits to the environment – and the people and their welfare – in the area extending from the Baltic Sea to the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.” Action Plan – Working document accompanying the Communication concerning the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – SEC(2009) 712 – December 2010. [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/action\\_17122010\\_en.doc](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/communic/baltic/action_17122010_en.doc).

<sup>59</sup> E-PINE Mission Statement, US State Department, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rt/epine/c10621.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> E-PINE, Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, <http://urm.lt/index.php?3165117915>.

economies and the digital divide in societies.<sup>61</sup> It goes without saying that Lithuania did not bring up any polar-related issues at the NFF meetings nor were similar issues raised by Lithuania at meetings with Nordic colleagues at the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers.<sup>62</sup>

### **Minuscule Arctic issues in domestic policies**

The business community in Lithuania downplays new openings in the Arctic and remains rather passive in addressing Lithuanian institutions.<sup>63</sup> No representatives from any entrepreneurial circles addressed the foreign ministry in regards to Arctic interests.<sup>64</sup> Other industries that could possess a deeper interest in the Arctic are fisheries, transport, logistics and tourism. However, the interests of fisheries do not travel far. The northernmost fishing spots are around the Norwegian Svalbard. Norway granted Lithuanian fishermen more than 600 days for shrimp catching and a few companies have used this opportunity since Soviet times.<sup>65</sup> Despite this, however, Arctic issues do not come across the Lithuanian fishing industry agenda.<sup>66</sup> The Ministry of Transport and Communications considers paying more attention to the High North in the near future, but for now the interest is rather low and the Arctic

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<sup>61</sup> Northern Future Forum, <http://www.futureforum2013.gov.lv/en/about-nff>.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with the employee at Foreign Ministry, January 7, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Mr. Mantas Nocius, Head of "Enterprise Lithuania", January 2, 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with the employee at Foreign Ministry, January 7, 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with the deputy director of Fishery Department at Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Aivaras Labanauskas February 11, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with the chief specialists at the Division of Common Agricultural Policy Strategy, at Ministry of Agriculture, Vaidas Talačka and Vitalija Fokienė, and Head of Fisheries Products and Market Subdivision, Laima Vaitonytė, at Ministry of Agriculture, February 3, 2014.

file is next to empty.<sup>67</sup> Klaipėda sea port does not register vessels coming from the Arctic.<sup>68</sup> Ships under the Lithuanian flag used to transport timber and oil products in the current northern territories in Russia, but these activities stopped some 20 years ago and have not resumed, as neither ships nor expeditions take Arctic routes nowadays.<sup>69</sup> The story of interest in the Arctic does not differ from the environmental point of view either, as aside from general concern about pollution and biological diversity there are no direct activities Lithuania pursues for the time being.<sup>70</sup> Last but not least, scientific interest in the Arctic is rather limited as well. The key issues that furnish scholarly curiosity in Lithuania are ornithology (bird migration) studies at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and climate change at Vilnius University. Lithuanian scientists have never organised scientific expeditions to the Arctic and except from random internships or study visits there is no complex research on Circumpolar North occurring from a hard sciences point of view either.<sup>71</sup>

### **Arctic interests compared: the cases of Latvia, Estonia and Poland**

Lithuania, as taking stock of polar interests elucidates, appears to be quite far from the High North geographically, politically and mentally.

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with the employee at the Ministry of Transport and Communications, 17 February, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Kristina Gontjer, Head of Marketing Division at the Klaipėda Seaport Authority, 10 January, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Evaldas Zacharevičius, Head of the Lithuanian Maritime Safety Administration, 22 January, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with the employee at the Ministry of Environment, 17 February, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with prof. Rimantas Vaitkus, Vice-Minister of Education and Science, 24 January, 2014.

Arctic interests for the Nordic states have been well heralded in corresponding recent Arctic Strategies,<sup>72</sup> as these countries have direct access to the more distant North. Yet Lithuania's politically neighbouring countries and frequent partners in regional affairs - Latvia, Estonia and Poland - do not avoid polar issues either. It is then relevant to establish points of compatibility on Arctic vectors with Lithuania's closest neighbours.

*A priori*, Latvian interests towards the High North can be similar to Lithuanian ones: small power, limited resources and interests, a multilateral approach and the telescopic distance to the far North. Latvia is in a phase of debates regarding the challenges and opportunities the Arctic renders and at times polar issues come into sight, such as the NB8 meetings with Japan.<sup>73</sup> Estonia, similar to Lithuania, opts for action via multilateral frameworks when it comes to High North related issues, as Estonia also supports an observer status for the EU at the Arctic Council.<sup>74</sup>

Estonian scholars consider their country's relationship to the Arctic in similar terms to Lithuania and Latvia, putting an emphasis on a multilateral approach via organisations Estonia is involved with. The key areas where Estonia could pay more attention are scientific polar research, as they had earlier been involved in this area and the Estonian Polar Research Programme for 2012–2014 foresees the areas of geology, sea ice and atmosphere physics, biology and climate change, and historical and educational facets as relevant topics. The other area of Estonian

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<sup>72</sup> Arctic Strategies, Arctic Council, <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/document-archive/category/12-arctic-strategies#>.

<sup>73</sup> Foreign Minister Rinkēvičs at ASEM ministerial accentuates significance of access to natural and energy resources, November 13, 2013, Latvian Foreign Ministry, <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/news/press-releases/2013/november/11-12>; Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Reinart: E-Services and Free Movement of Information Have Great Economic Potential, November 13, 2013, Estonian Foreign Ministry, <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/node/18559>.

<sup>74</sup> Estonia Would Like For European Union to Gain Observer Status in the Arctic Council, February 3, 2013, Estonian Review, Estonian Foreign Ministry, <http://www.vm.ee/?q=en/node/16431>.

interest is space strategy as part of the Arctic policy, with precise satellite-based information for communication, navigation and surveying. Estonia intends to join the European Space Agency and thereby employ technological achievements in the polar milieu and enhancing the country's competitiveness in the field of space industry technologies. Future gas reserves in the Circumpolar North are considered as an alternative to Russian gas also.<sup>75</sup>

Poland, in turn, has traditionally played a more tangible role in the Arctic compared with the Baltic states. The country has held an observer status at the Barents Euro-Arctic Council since 1993, and the Arctic Council since 1996. The current Polish approach to the Polar Regions exerts a concentrated effort to promote the country's scientific interests and widen opportunities for collaboration with other Arctic-interested parties. Poland is the only Central European country which has had scientific infrastructure set up in the High North: Polish researchers have been working at several research facilities at the Spitsbergen island on the Svalbard Archipelago since the 1950s. Hence, initial Polish concerns in the High North have focused on favourable conditions for scientists, whereas economic or strategic interests has not scored high as a priority. However, Poland's involvement in environmental cooperation in the Arctic has become more salient since the early 1990s. Warsaw turned more ambitious in polar issues since the mid-noughties and as the country maintains an observer status at the Arctic Council they therefore have an enhanced role. Traditionally, Poland takes part in several levels of meetings at the AC through ministerial, undersecretary and Senior Arctic Officials roles. Poland initiated the so-called Warsaw format (meetings of representatives of state observers with the presidency of the AC) and this level was raised to that of undersecretaries of state. Polish scientists participate in working groups of the AC.<sup>76</sup> Circumpolar

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<sup>75</sup> Miru, Oliver (2013), Overview of the Arctic, International Centre for Defence Studies, <http://icds.ee/fileadmin/failid/Oliver%20M%F5ru%20-%20Overview%20of%20the%20Arctic-1.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> Arctic Council, Polish Foreign Ministry, [http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign\\_pol-](http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_pol-)

North related questions loomed in bilateral meetings with Nordic states in 2013.<sup>77</sup> Poland's present increased political involvement in the Arctic encompasses issues varying from promotion of the freedom of scientific research, to enhancement of mutual trust, stability, and security around the North Pole.<sup>78</sup> Current Polish political activity in the Arctic stems from promotion of its scientific interests and an attempt to play the role of an intermediary state in relations between the Arctic and non-Arctic actors. Poland, in contrast to the Nordic states, does not have any officially stated Arctic policy. Warsaw does not voice significant interests concerning polar natural resources or shipping, and this is perceived as an advantage, enabling them to be an advocate for closer collaboration between the Arctic and outside actors.<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusions and outlook

While for most of us there is a fat chance of visiting the Arctic, nonetheless it is closer to us now than ever thought possible. Excessive political enthusiasm and concerns regarding possible eye-watering riches and opportunities in the High North are not a *dépêche mode*. The Arctic has

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icy/international\_organisations/other\_organisations/arctic\_council.

<sup>77</sup> Poland partners with Norway on regional policy and development projects, Polish Foreign Ministry, [http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/poland\\_partners\\_with\\_norway\\_on\\_regional\\_policy\\_and\\_development\\_projects](http://www.msz.gov.pl/en/news/poland_partners_with_norway_on_regional_policy_and_development_projects).

<sup>78</sup> Łuszczuk, Michał (2013), Arctic Council Observer: The Development and Significance of Poland's Approach towards the Arctic Region, in Aldo Chirco et al. eds, *Ocean Yearbook 27*, Leiden/Boston, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, [http://www.academia.edu/3125522/Arctic\\_Council\\_Observer\\_The\\_Development\\_and\\_Significance\\_of\\_Poland's\\_Approach\\_towards\\_the\\_Arctic\\_Region](http://www.academia.edu/3125522/Arctic_Council_Observer_The_Development_and_Significance_of_Poland's_Approach_towards_the_Arctic_Region).

<sup>79</sup> Graczyk, Piotr (2013), Poland and the Arctic: Between Science and Diplomacy, in Lassi Heininen, ed., *Arctic Yearbook: The Arctic of Regions vs. Globalised Arctic 2013*, [http://www.arcticyearbook.com/images/Articles\\_2012/Graczyk.pdf](http://www.arcticyearbook.com/images/Articles_2012/Graczyk.pdf).

turned politically hot in the recent years and more and more countries, even outside the polar region, crane out northwards to institutionalise their presence and interests. Lithuania gradually assumes more important regional and global roles through the presidencies of CBSS, OSCE, the Council of the EU, and soon the Security Council of the United Nations. The Arctic is no longer Delphic in Lithuania, though polar resources are still seen as high hanging fruit. The country behaves in the status of a small state tied to a specific historical and geographic context – Arctic interest moves at glacial speed here. A small state, as a rule, has a limited scale of material and human resources, and thus a narrower range of action. Lithuania does not even have a small stake in the “Arctic system” and so, has next to nothing to say about the unravelling polar games.

Limited by the lack of interest and focus, devoid of financial, human and institutional resources, let alone expertise, Vilnius is naturally reactive, yet remains collaborative when it comes to the Arctic. Although political awareness about polar relevance has sky rocketed and a number of countries have elaborated strategies towards the Circumpolar North, the Lithuanian government, political parties and private sector do not foresee or even discuss the country's involvement in the Arctic unilaterally. Dealing with the High North is left to multilateral devices, primarily to the EU which expressed a deeper interest in the Arctic during recent years. Lithuania does not yet deal with Arctic questions through NATO, or via regional frameworks like the Northern Dimension, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the EU Baltic Sea Strategy, the E-PINE and the Nordic Future.

Lithuania's closest political neighbours, Estonia and Latvia, seem to be on the same road towards the North, however Poland retains a greater degree of activity in scientific and intermediary activities in the Circumpolar North. Therefore, one can anticipate similar Baltic positions in looking for resource and return based niches through Arctic cooperation. Lithuania is unlikely to increase its profile in the Arctic unilaterally, yet support for polar issues might resurface in return for guarantees that attention towards the High North does not come at a political, security

and financial expense for the Baltic Sea area. Moreover, Arctic economic activities might be seen in the light of competition, since for instance, transport and logistics services going from Lithuania to Asia, and mainly China, by land would be prioritised over thawing and navigable Arctic lanes. Limited resources and benefits is expected to lead to a pragmatic and narrow minded approach in allocating current resources to niches of cooperation like science, environment, and the like.

Recommending anything for the field which can be considered as a *tabula rasa* in Lithuanian politics or for the economy is easy, but can be difficult. On the one hand, a theatre of polar geopolitics and geo-economics delivers new opportunities which, given sufficient resources and capacities, would enable any country to find its role no matter how significant in the North. On the other, the present capabilities of Lithuania dictate a rational approach for a short-term perspective towards the High North. Strategically, Vilnius will not want to mess with the power of the US or push for a unilateral agenda within the EU – it is highly unlikely they would. Actors involved in low politics such as environment, energy, transport and logistics, communication, science and mining, rescue and safety, either public or private, should keep their eyes open and nail down lucrative deals along the logic of pragmatism, as Arctic politics is definitely beyond Lithuanian reach even on an intermediary level. Small scale involvement now might boost Lithuania's collaborative status and the idea of a 'global Lithuania' would acquire a detectable shape in the future.

The increasing interdependence and importance of Nordic-Baltic regionalism, and the Europeanisation of foreign policy and security concerns, will most likely make Lithuania keep a low profile regarding the Arctic, and 'help' escape support for any conflicting positions among Western partners in the Arctic-5. In general Lithuania's interest in the higher role of NATO and the EU would be welcomed due to enhanced scope and opportunities for contributing in the key hard and security bodies Lithuania adheres to. All in all, the High North for Lithuania remains a metaphysical black cat – it is out there, not here, yet.

## **LATVIA IN THE ARCTIC: A CASE STUDY OF RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR A SMALL SUB-ARCTIC COUNTRIES**

*Mārtiņš Vargulis*

### **Introduction**

The notion of Arcticness is on the rise and increasingly influences strategic considerations of global and regional actors. During the last few decades the interests of many international actors in the Arctic region have significantly increased. However, not only Arctic countries are interested in the region. Countries without direct access to the Arctic, such as Sweden and Finland, are permanent members of the Arctic Council. Other European countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and even Spain, have become permanent observer states in the institution. Meanwhile, Latvia being distant both geographically and mentally, has been rather non-reactive than proactive when defining its interests in the High North.

Size and distance matter. Taking into account the long distance between the Arctic and Latvia, it might seem the Arctic is too far for Latvian entrepreneurs with any business activities in the region. Second, it might also seem too far for any political risks, as well as opportunities