

Introduction: The Arctic Council, the European Union, and Polar Politics—Canada, France, Germany, Russia, and the United Kingdom

Frances Abele, March 2014

In 2014 Canada is still awkwardly bound by its nineteenth century origins. The geographic and demographic character of the provinces—and the constitutional division of powers—were established before motorized ground travel was common, before mass air travel was dreamt of, and long before the Internet lifted some of the psychological constraints of distance and locality. Transportation infrastructure channels our travels east and west. When Canadian history is diachronically taught it is very frequently recounted as the story of European exploration and settlement from east to west. There are many consequences of this “latitudinal” perspective, the most serious of which is that it distorts understanding by ignoring the many histories of the civilizations that were here before Europeans arrived—including those to whom the circumpolar Arctic is home.

A second distorting effect of the nineteenth century origin is the extent to which Canada’s current situation as an important power in the circumpolar basin is invisible to Canadian citizens. Our long Arctic coastline, second in size only to that of Russia, and our strategic position for Atlantic-Pacific and North America-Russia shipping—not to mention our world-changing innovations in democratic governance in the northern territories—are rarely integrated in public discussions about fundamental political and economic decisions. Within the country, Canadians look east and west, not north. Beyond our borders, they look south (though little neck-stretching is required to see the constantly communicating colossus on our southern perimeter), east to Europe, or west to the trading partners of Asia. It is tempting to consider that these psychological dispositions account for the extent to which the northern dimension of Canadian foreign policy remains an appendix to the country’s main business abroad.

With this special issue of the *Northern Review*, we offer some countervailing perspectives. Authors from a variety of disciplines and several countries consider one important aspect of circumpolar politics—relations among Canada, the European Union (EU), some of the EU countries, and some neighbouring states such as Russia. Two contributors, Terry Fenge and Jennifer Spence, focus on the Arctic Council. Fenge provides a close analysis of the recent history of the Arctic Council, with an eye to how Canada, occupying the Council’s chair until 2015, will respond to key challenges. Spence lifts the lid on an often-ignored feature of circumpolar affairs: how the internal organization of a participating state (in this case, Canada) affects its foreign policy and approach to a particular international organization. Cecile Pelaudeix and Thierry Rodon take up similar themes in their comparison of efforts by the European Union, Germany, and France to develop coherent Arctic policies in the context of growing regional complexity and other national priorities. Richard Powell explores the complex interplay of United Kingdom and Scotland political goals with respect to EU membership and Scottish independence, as these are refracted in discussions of Arctic policy and approaches to Arctic environmental and other challenges. Russian goals in the Arctic and the charged relations between Russia and the EU are the focus of Pami Aalto’s analysis, which concludes that sovereignty and great power management issues constrain opportunities for co-operation on trade and environmental stewardship. Heather Nicol draws attention to the original sovereign peoples of the circumpolar region, considering how evolving contemporary understandings of Arctic sovereignty may affect the non-state actors—Indigenous governments and organizations—in the region.

This special issue of the *Northern Review* also includes a review by Victor Sauntry of Whitney Lackenbauer’s long awaited history of the Canadian Rangers, a study that fills in an important “northern dimension” to Canadian defence policy. Three other important books relevant to our theme have been published recently: Ken S. Coates, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, William Morrison, and Greg Poelzer, *Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North* (Thomas Allen, 2010); Franklyn Griffiths, Rob Huebert, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security, and Stewardship* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011); and Richard Powell and Klaus Dodds, *Polar Geopolitics? Knowledges, Resources and Legal Regimes* (Edward Elgar, 2014).

Many of the articles in this collection had their origin in a September 2011 conference organized by the Centre for European Studies (EU Centre of Excellence) at Carleton University, on “The European Union, Canada, and the Arctic: International Policy on the Arctic.” While that conference was funded with the assistance of the European Union, the contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Guest Editor

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