

ECOSOC Chair Report

Topic 2: Establishing Frameworks for the Responsible Use of Resources in the Arctic and Antarctica



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Personal Statements

Chair - Celina Kraushaar

Hi, my name is Celina, I am 18 years old and currently in 12th grade. My MUN experience started at MUNISS 4 years ago and now it is my second time chairing and my 9th conference in general. Without MUNISS I would not be the person I am today and I want to make the conference in April a memorable experience for you, not just academic wise but simply getting to know one another and having a great time. ECOSOC is an advanced committee that will challenge you to engage in high-level policymaking and finding a balance between national interests and global sustainability. A difficult task, but I am sure you will exceed all of our expectations!



Deputy Chair – Amélie Jacob

Honorable Delegates,

My name is Amélie Jacob and I am currently 17 years old, attending 11th grade. It is my pleasure to be your deputy chair of the economic and social council (ECOSOC) at the 2025 edition of the annual MUNISS conference.

The forthcoming conference will be my first time as a chair at MUNISS, however I have attended MUNISS twice as a delegate in the World Health



Organisation (WHO) and the Security Council (SC) before.

Alongside the lovely head chair Celina Kraushaar, we will ensure a solution-oriented and fruitful debate, to nurture your debating skills and enhance your MUNISS experience. I look forward to meeting you at the conference!

Amélie Jacob



Introduction

The Antarctic and Arctic play a key role when it comes to preventing the crossing of tipping points and minimising the consequences of climate change. Not only does the white ice reflect the sunlight, the Polar Region is also home to many unique species. However, there is strong evidence for many valuable resources hidden under the seabed, which are more and exposed due to the melting of ice. This leads to many countries and parties taking interest in these regions, starting disputes over territorial claims of areas such as the Lomonosov Ridge. The focus shifts to the economy, while the Polar Regions are in dire need of environmental protection, since not only resources get exposed by global warming but also C02 and viruses that were captured by permafrost. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a strong and clear framework on how the resources in the Arctic and Antarctica should be handled to ensure responsible usage.

Glossary

Arctic: The Arctic is the world's northernmost region and includes the Arctic Ocean, parts of Russia, the United States, Greenland, Canada, Norway, Iceland, Sweden and Finland. The climate is characterized through extremely cold, long winters and polar ice and permafrost throughout the year. It is home to multiple indigenous tribes and people such as the Inuit, Saami, Chukchi, Yupik and Kalaallit (Britannica).

Antarctica: Antarctica is the world's southernmost continent and the fifth largest. It surrounds the South Pole and spans over 14 million square km. It is the coldest region on earth with temperatures dropping below -80°C. There is no permanent human population and it is governed by the Antarctic Treaty System. The continent plays a crucial role in climate regulation e.g. with its importance for ocean currents and sea level stability (Britannica).

Territorial Dispute: A disagreement between two or more political parties over the possession and control of a territory often connected to natural



resources that can be found there. They are very often the cause for war and terrorism. (Wikipedia)

Responsible: Being responsible for something means having the duty to take care of it and preserving it for future generations. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Antarctic Treaty System: A set of international agreements regulating activities in Antarctica, ensuring that the continent is used for scientific research only, banning military activity. It includes the Antarctic Treaty (1959), Protocol on Environmental Protection (1991), Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (1980) and more (Antarctic Treaty).

Lomonosov Ridge: The ridge is over 1 800 kilometers long and located in the Arctic Ocean, dividing it into two major basins, and it influences water circulation, marine life, and ice movement. It contains many valuable resources such as oil, natural gas, minerals, metal and gas hydrates, making it a very attractive region for multiple countries and hence causing territorial disputes. So far Russia, Denmark and Canada requested to extend their territory by the ridge (Britannica).

Permafrost: Permafrost is perennially frozen ground that remains frozen for a minimum of two consecutive years. It can be found both in the Arctic and Antarctic. Large amounts of harmful gases such as carbon and methane are stored in the ice and will be released when the ice melts, worsening the greenhouse effect and contributing to climate change. Furthermore, it acts as a natural time capsule and preserved biological material, including viruses and bacteria, which are extremely dangerous for the human immune system, since they existed for multiple millennia and are being released with the melting of the ice. They could also have a devastating impact on local wildlife (Britannica).

Arctic Council: The Arctic Council is an independent intergovernmental forum, focusing on Arctic issues. It cooperates with United Nations and has eight arctic member states (Canada, Denmark (including Greenland & the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, United States (Alaska)) and six indigenous organizations (Inuit Circumpolar Council



(ICC), Saami Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich'in Council International (GCI), Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC)) hold permanent participation status. It does not deal with military issues but focuses on scientific and environmental research (Arctic Council).

Fossil Fuels: Fossil fuels are naturally occurring carbon or hydrocarbon fuels, such as coal, petroleum, peat and natural gas, formed by the decomposition of prehistoric organisms (Collins). Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere contributing to climate change and the extraction leads to pollution, affecting ecosystems and human health.

Climate change tipping points: Climate change tipping points are thresholds in our climate system. If they are exceeded, irreversible and significant changes of climate would be the consequence, since they trigger cascading effects, affecting weather patterns, ecosystems and ocean currents. The Arctic Sea Ice loss and the melting ice shield in Greenland are tipping points, both altering ocean circulation and raising the global sea level (The European Space Agency).

Issue Explanation

Both the Arctic and Antarctica have natural resources of high value and many countries are interested in these promising areas, especially since more and more of the resources are exposed due to the melting of ice. According to the United States Geological Survey, 13% of the world's undiscovered oil and 30% of natural gas lies in the Arctic (U.S. Geological Survey). In the Antarctic you can find copper deposits in the Antarctic Peninsula, coal beds and other valuable minerals such as gold and lead, but the Antarctic Treaty currently prohibits commercial extraction (Encyclopaedia of Environment and Society).



However, both ecosystems are very fragile and play a key role in preventing the crossing of climate change tipping points, as well as the invaluable resources they contain being mismanaged.

The Antarctic is believed to contain around 60% - 70% percent of the world's freshwater (British Antarctic Survey). Therefore, the idea has been proposed to tow icebergs to arid areas of the world that are in dire need of freshwater as a possible solution to water shortages, like Cape Town has experienced back in 2017. However, this could disturb and possibly even destroy fragile ecosystems, as well as change major ocean currents that would lead to big changes in weather patterns. Besides the tremendous costs, the question arises who owns the ice and the Antarctic Treaty prohibits resource exploitation (The Guardian).

Due to global warming, the Arctic Sea Ice has been melting giving access to new marine routes and natural resources, such as fossil fuels and minerals. Unlike Antarctica, the Arctic does not have a treaty that is regulating or even prohibiting resource exploitation. The Arctic council promotes cooperation; however, none of the resolutions is legally binding. Many countries such as the USA, Canada, Russia, and Norway, each with social, political, and economic interests that may not always conform to the common interest of environmental protection and may be conflicting in territorial claims against each other surrounding the Arctic (Council of Foreign Relations).

The main obstacle to establishing a global governance system for the Polar Regions is the widespread if not universal territorial claims or resource interests of their own that would be staked out by so many countries whose individual interdependence breeds mistrust among states. While countries like Norway and Iceland emphasise the importance of environmental protection and resource conservation, other nations are interested in making money out of the economic potential that both the Arctic and Antarctica hold. Furthermore, there are geopolitical tensions concerning territorial claims, as they are overlapping and even though the Antarctic Treaty froze them for the Antarctic, there are still ongoing disputes about territory in the Arctic, as global warming exposes more and more resources. A major conflict would be the Lomonosov Ridge (BBC).



Oil and minerals

Oil, or petroleum or crude oil, is a fossil fuel that is made from the remains of ancient sea organisms deposited over millions of years. Oil is a natural hydrocarbon liquid which is often formed from fossils found in underground reservoirs, below sedimentary rock strata (National Geographic). Technical difficulties of extraction are weather, isolation, and icing complicating Arctic oil production and making it technically challenging and expensive, since oil spill cleanup is almost impossible. Regulatory examination and public outcry have emerged from the fear of oil spill and environmental damage. Major oil companies, including ExxonMobil and Shell, have been investing in Arctic drilling; but some were postponed or dropped because of environmental issues and oil market variation. Oil spills can destroy an entire ecosystem and do great damage for marine life, as could be seen in 1989 with the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Furthermore, the construction needed for the drilling and the activity itself generates heat, contributing to the melting of ice and permafrost and the released pollutants such as black carbon reduce the ice's reflectivity by settling on it, contributing to climate change (WWF). Oil extraction in the Antarctic is banned by the Antarctic Treaty System, specifically through the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, known as the Madrid Protocol. This agreement prohibits commercial mining and oil extraction until 2048, unless all parties that signed the treaty lift the ban. Extraction of oil in Antarctica would be even more damaging for nature and climate, since the ecosystem in the Antarctic is more fragile and has a harsher and colder climate. This would prevent oil from breaking down, leading to permanent irreversible environmental damages. Russia and China have expressed interest in possible oil extraction in the Antarctic in the future (Australian Antarctic Program).

The Arctic is very rich in minerals, metals and rare earth elements (REEs). REEs mainly can be found in Greenland, Canada and Russia and are crucial for electronics, defence industry and renewable energy. Gold, silver and copper are being extracted in Canada, Alaska and Russia, but there is growing interest for extraction in Greenland. Greenland also holds one of the world's largest deposits of zinc and lead. Furthermore, there are iron ore and uranium to be found. The environmental risks of mineral extraction are



similar to the ones of oil extraction. The created heat through extraction leads to a melting of ice and permafrost, there is the risk of water contamination and destroying ecosystems by affecting the habitat of certain species. Mineral extraction in Antarctica is prohibited by the Antarctic Treaty System (WWF).



Perspectives of Parties Involved

Antarctica

The Antarctic Treaty was signed by 12 countries, but particularly countries such as the United States of America, Russia and China are in support of conservation of nature and scientific research in Antarctica, these countries are also interested in possible economic gains from natural resources if the treaty were amended. Countries such as China have expanded their presence and investment in research stations, possibly pursuing a means of staking resource claims for the future (The Diplomat, Antarctic Treaty).

Environmental organisations strongly support the Antarctic Treaty System and emphasise the need for environmental protection, given the fact that the Antarctic is a tipping element of climate change (WWF).

Arctic

There are seven countries controlling arctic land:

Canada

The Canadian Arctic is very rich in minerals such as gold and diamond (Reuters), but nevertheless emphasises on the need of environmental protection, ensuring that any resource extraction is not harmful to the ecosystem and respects the rights of indigenous people. In December 2024 Canada launched a new foreign policy concerning the Arctic, putting stress on international cooperation and the engagement of indigenous communities (Government of Canada).

Denmark (Greenland)

Greenland is an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark with many natural resources such as oil, gas, fish and minerals. Denmark is promoting environmental protection and cooperation of countries for the



benefit of science. It supports Greenlands self-governance and declined to sell Greenland to the U.S.. It is a NATO ally and has also increased its military presence in the region due to the increasing military activity of Russia and other countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark).

Finland

Finland shares a border with Russia, has a coastline along the Baltic Sea and Arctic ocean, and hence, plays a crucial role when it comes to ensuring arctic security. It is highly interested in the sustainable management of natural resources, trying to find a balance between economic interests and conservation of nature (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland).

Iceland

Iceland is located in the North Atlantic Ocean and functions as a trading waypoint between the United States of America and Europe. It is committed to environmental protection and increasing scientific research on the Arctic and arctic climate change (Government of Iceland).

Norway

Norway has a long arctic coastline and as the largest producer of oil and natural gas in Europe it is aiming to explore the resources that are believed to be in the arctic region, especially in the Baltic Sea. However, Norway prioritises environmental protection and tries to support local economies and align resource extraction with nature conservation (German Arctic Office).

Russia

Russia has increased military activity in the arctic region, creating tensions with NATO allies. The reopening of Soviet-Era Bases marks the beginning of



a greater military activity, which is constantly increasing especially since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war. While Russia might be interested in the geopolitical position the Arctic holds, there are also multiple natural resources Russia takes in interest in such as oil and natural gas. Russia acknowledges the importance of environmental protection but its main interest lies in economic benefits and political power when it comes to the Arctic (USNI News).

United States (Alaska)

The U.S. has increased military activity as a counterpart to Russia and China's military activity in the Arctic in order to strengthen security in the arctic region (U.S. Department of Defence). While they are stressing the importance of environmental protection, the Willow Project was launched in 2023 with oil drilling beginning early in 2024. Since the Trump administration there is a growing interest in the Arctic, as he already expressed interest in buying Greenland in 2019 and repeated this early in 2025 raising the question of Greenlands governance, since it is currently part of Denmark and autonomous (Time).

Arctic Council

The Arctic council was established in 1996, with the signing of the Ottawa convention and includes eight arctic nations (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, USA) and indigenous organizations, focusing on environmental protection and sustainable development but not directly tackles conflict about land or resources. Non-Arctic States are allowed to participate as observers if they hold the observer status, which currently describes 13 countries and international organisations. The Arctic Council does not hold legal authority and is not part of the United Nations, however it operates in close connection (Arctic Council).



History of the Topic

Arctic

Indigenous peoples including the Inuit, Sami, Chukchi and others have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years. They formed distinct cultures, languages and ways of sustaining themselves, through hunting, fishing and gathering. Their close connection to the land and sea has influenced their cultures and ways of life. Interest in Arctic resources started with explorers like Robert Peary and Ernest Shackleton. Early exploration was centered on whaling and fur-trapping (ChurchillScience).

After the Second World War the Mineral industry was booming. Major mining and exploration of mineral deposits—up through Canada and Alaska, especially gold, silver, lead and zinc—had just begun. The war also made the Arctic a strategic asset, contributing to an expanding military buildup and other infrastructure development in places like Alaska and Greenland. The Arctic emerged as a hotspot of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union and the West during the Cold War, which spurred further exploration and military activities (U.S. Geological Survey).

In recent years the melting of ice as a consequence of climate change has opened up new shipping routes and parts of the area previously locked from exploration, spurring interest in Arctic oil and gas. Russia, Norway and the U.S. have ramped up exploration activities (U.S. Geological Survey). The Willow Project for example is a large oil drilling endeavor in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska. Greenlit by the Biden administration in March 2023, it could produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil a day and started early in 2024. It faces hard criticism due to potential risks for wildlife and its general contribution to climate change (Reuters). Furthermore, interest of the U.S. in Greenland has been renewed after discovering its wealth in minerals, including rare earths and uranium, and oil. Former President Trump's bid to purchase Greenland in 2019 underscored the region's strategic significance. While the U.S. didn't follow through with the purchase, it has shifted its attention more on collaboration with Greenland and Denmark for resource exploration and development (New York Times).



Antarctica

The early exploration was largely scientific, including the mapping and understanding of the continent's geography through explorers such as James Clarke Ross and Ernest Shackleton. In the 19th century, the sealing and whaling industries made Antarctic waters a lucrative hunting ground. Species such as the elephant seal and blue whale were over-exploited. All these activities had negative impacts on the wildlife populations, and increased the awareness about conservation. This and other incidents resulted in the Antarctic Treaty System.

The Antarctic Treaty, which was signed in 1959, has designated the region a zone for peaceful scientific research. The Madrid Protocol which was signed in 1991 banned mineral extraction including oil and gas, essentially precluding resource harvesting in Antarctica.



Potential Solutions for the issue: Antarctic

Antarctic Treaty

The Antarctic Treaty, signed 1959, entered into force in 1961 and contains these crucial agreements:

- Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only
- Freedom of scientific investigation in Antarctica and cooperation toward that end... shall continue

Art. II

 Scientific observations and results from Antarctica shall be exchanged and made freely available

Art. III

There are seven countries with territorial claims in Antarctica (Argentina, Australia, Chile, France, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom). The USA and Russia have no claims yet, but they reserved themselves the right to make any in the future if the treaty should end.

Furthermore, no new countries can claim land in Antarctica, countries with old claims cannot expand them and countries that do not recognize these claims cannot use their actions to challenge them.

The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (1991) prohibits mining activities in Antarctica. (Antarctic Treaty)

CCAS (Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals)

The Convention was signed in 1972, came into force in 1978 and is part of the Antarctic treaty system. It focuses on the protection of six seal species, limits hunting and prohibits their killing. Furthermore, there is scientific



monitoring of the seal population and the parties to CCAS meet every five years in order to review the progress. (CCAS)

CCAMLR (Commission for the Convention on Antarctic Marine Living Resources)

The CCAMLR was signed in 1980 and adds to the protection of seals the protection of marine life, including krill and fish. (CCAMLR)

Arctic

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

UNCLOS is an international treaty that was adopted in 1982 and came into force in 1994. It established a legal allocation of waters and provided rules for the use of them and their resources.

Russia requested three times (2001, 2015, 2021) to extend its continental shelf so that it includes the Lomonosov Ridge, which is currently part of the international seabed area. The ridge runs through the central Arctic, includes parts near the North Pole and stretches for more than 1,700km, making it valuable for resource claims, since under the seabed large deposits of gas, oil and minerals are suspected (BBC). Besides Russia, both Denmark (2014) and Canada (2019) made claims, all three of them arguing that the extension would be only natural since the Lomonosov Ridge is already part of their territory, whether it be Greenland or Siberia (UNCLOS). The CLCS (United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf) only grants these territorial claims when there is any scientific validation for them. Currently the UN has not officially ruled on any of these claims (CLCS). The US has not ratified UNCLOS yet, meaning it cannot make any claims.

Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA)

In 2018, ten countries and parties (Canada, China, Denmark, the European Union, Iceland, Japan, Norway, Russia, South Korea and the United States) signed the CAOFA, which came into force in 2021. It includes a 16-year long



ban on commercial fishing in the Arctic to allow scientists to understand the ecosystem better. It is a precautionary approach and just like the Paris Agreement legally binding for the countries that signed it. The CAOFA allows the ecosystem to recover while scientists find out whether or not commercial fishing in the high Arctic can be granted in the future or if the consequences would be too devastating (WWF).



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