

Briefing Note

Innovative policy dialogue on oil and gas drilling in Arctic seas versus environmental protection

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The University of Lapland Model Arctic Council was held from 29 October to 2 November 2018 in Rovaniemi, Finland, during the second rotating Finnish Arctic Council Chairmanship. Fifty-one students from 13 countries and 32 universities took part in this international Arctic Council simulation. The MAC was hosted by the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi and led by Professor Lassi Heininen. The simulation was an official activity of the Finnish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council 2017–2019 run by the Finnish Foreign Ministry. The event was financially supported by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It was a collaborative effort continuing the work of the Thematic Network on Model Arctic Council led by Professors Mary Ehrlander and Brandon Boylan of the University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UArctic, n.d.).

The Arctic Council structure provided the overall framework for the simulation. The Arctic Council is the primary forum for international cooperation, environmental protection and advocacy work in the Arctic. It is a policy-shaping forum, and indicative for its consensus-building role in the current context has been the binding Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (2013). The Arctic Council and its Working Groups have provided a significant amount of information about the Arctic environment and contributed greatly to global understanding and discussion of the effects of climate change.

The Model Arctic Council is described as an experiential learning exercise (UArctic, n.d.). The main aim of the MAC 2018 was to simulate an international negotiation regarding Arctic offshore oil and gas drilling in the context of the Arctic Council structure. The goal of the simulation was to reproduce the mechanisms of international negotiations between member states and other stakeholders. However, the participants were encouraged “to go beyond” the Arctic Council framework, as underlined by Professor Lassi Heininen. Thus, the participants were inspired to explore innovative common solutions¹ – slightly reformulating the motto of the Finnish Chairmanship – which were still compatible with their assigned roles.

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Participants were carefully chosen among advanced undergraduate, Masters and PhD students. Delegates were first asked to provide a wish list of their preferred roles for the simulation among States, Permanent Participants, Working Groups, Observers, international environmental non-governmental organizations, oil companies and other stakeholders. However, nobody was allowed to represent their own country of origin. The simulation provided an action-oriented learning arrangement. Assigned tasks and a comprehensive reading list prepared students to their roles. Everyone was required to write a position paper on the topic from one's assigned perspective in advance. Participants' growth within their roles was evident throughout the week.

The simulation had its starting point in a real-world Arctic problem complex of the beginning of 21st century. The participants needed to understand the interplay between science, politics and economics in order to successfully manage the diplomatic and negotiation processes at hand. The question of natural resource utilization versus environmental protection revealed the "Arctic entwinements of energy, climate and politics" (Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit).² The question of oil and gas drilling was chosen for the simulation because natural resource utilization is rarely discussed in the Arctic Council. It is still worth remembering, however, that oil pollution is one of the original priorities of Arctic environmental protection (Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, 1991).

Offshore oil and gas drilling in the Arctic presents both opportunities and challenges. The oil and gas industry is a key economic driver across the Arctic (AMAP, 2007: 1). Sustainable economic development is desirable, but the energy sector may not have unacceptable cultural or ecological impacts. The Arctic Council Working Groups see hydrocarbon extraction as a climatic and contaminant issue as well as a challenge to biodiversity and marine safety. In the oil and gas industry pollution cannot be completely eliminated, so a risk of adverse environmental effects remains even with the best available technology. In the meantime, global warming has made Arctic waters generally more accessible for modern industries. In a world increasingly aware of climate change, the energy sector produces a lion's share of global carbon dioxide emissions.

After introductory lectures given by Professors on Monday, the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) Chair Aleksi Härkönen welcomed the junior delegates to the Model Arctic Council. In his speech Ambassador Härkönen underlined the need for more science-policy interplay because energy and climate change are transforming the future. There is strong scientific evidence about the tremendous and rapid transformation of the Arctic region. The valuable discussion and exchange of experience between students and senior Arctic experts was enabled by an opportune timing with other official Arctic Council activities. The MAC was organized back-to-back with a SAO meeting in the same venue. Later the week, both the students and attendees of the Senior Arctic Officials' meeting and the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) meeting were gathered to a reception at Rovaniemi City Hall. It prepared an inspired and energized atmosphere where the participants invited their real-life counterparts to follow the Ministerial Summit on Thursday afternoon. The simultaneous events provided combined benefits and enriched the MAC participants' experiences.

In terms of the MAC exercise itself, the week was comprised of simulations of the Working Groups, SAO meetings and a final Ministerial Summit with a follow-up discussion. It was surprising how the process was developed step-by-step, even though the participants did not receive any ready-made script. Professor Lassi Heininen acted as a facilitator of the event.

Professors Mary Ehrlander, Brandon Boylan and Heather Exner-Pirot served as coaches. Nonetheless, the participants made the decisions and reacted to each other's actions.

The crowning moment of the simulation was a Special Ministerial Summit on Arctic Energy Horizons. The participants presented their final speeches in front of senior Arctic experts. The audience was briefed that the students will negotiate as if they were alone in the auditorium. The atmosphere was as innovative as it was thrilled when the students agreed on establishment of a new Working Group, *Working towards Arctic Visionary Energy Solutions* (WAVES) and launched a Declaration (Arctic Energy Horizons: A Vision for Sustainable Arctic Solutions, 2018). The senior Arctic experts welcomed the result with a standing ovation. The Model Arctic Council had reached a consensus in an innovative and sustainable energy future in the Arctic.

The mandate of the new Working Group would “be to support collaborative research on, and to identify and develop best practices for Arctic-specific challenges in energy production, diversification, and technology” (Arctic Energy Horizons: A Vision for Sustainable Arctic Solutions, 2018). The prioritization of human development and Indigenous perspectives was an integral part of the Declaration. Permanent Participants' Joint Statement on Indigenous Issues in Arctic Council Discussions was included in the Declaration (ibid). In addition, the Declaration encouraged “the expansion of commitment to and enhanced coordination of rapid response for rescue and disaster clean-up in Arctic waters” recognizing harsh operation conditions (ibid). The Declaration went even further by presenting “a legally binding agreement on oil pollution prevention with stricter minimum standards” (ibid). Even more innovative approaches to renewable energy throughout the Arctic region were supported. This is to say that technological energy development and improving energy development standards have a major role in the Arctic, while the ongoing hydrocarbon utilization should be balanced with health effects and socio-economic aspects.

The week full of intense negotiating was rounded out by some extra-curricular activities. A visit to the science centre Arktikum satisfied a need to get to know Arctic nature and Indigenous Sámi culture. A visit in Rovaniemi would not have been complete without crossing the Arctic Circle and meeting Santa Claus in his official hometown.

An obvious goal of the experiential learning experience was to gain knowledge about the main topics and train argumentation skills. The simulation allowed for the examination of a multifaceted problem of natural resource utilization versus environmental protection that is not often subject to direct experimentation. The experience provided the participants with confidence to manage similar challenges and decision-making situations in real life. It was fruitful for non-native English speakers to sharpen their oral and written English skills, but it was as necessary to patiently practice active listening which allows dialogue. When the time came to formulate the final speeches for every delegation, native English speakers helped with style and phrasing. The MAC broke the glass ceiling by nominating a female Chair for the Ministerial Summit, and also encouraged non-native speakers of English to give the final speech in front of a full auditorium of high-ranking Arctic diplomats. The learning curve was above ordinary for the entirety of the simulation.

The opportunities for learning reached far beyond just the field of diplomacy. It was enlightening for local participants to share some responsibility of the arrangements. It was eye-opening to see that it is the smallest details, hospitality and a local contact point which mean so much to

conference guests. In a best case scenario they do not even notice the little hassles behind the scenes. Thus, some organizing and anticipation skills were also acquired.

Networks and intercultural exchange in the Arctic setting should be mentioned as an added value of the MAC. It was an exciting privilege to have face-to-face interaction with Working Group representatives, Senior Arctic Officials and Permanent Participant representatives to discuss their experiences about leadership skills. We made new Arctic friends who will hopefully one day become our colleagues and Arctic leaders. As I summed up in my farewell speech: “from the north, for the world”.

Notes

1. The topic of the Finnish Chairmanship in the Arctic Council 2017–2019 was Exploring Common Solutions (Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland, 2017).
2. “Arctic entwinements of energy, climate and politics” is a subtheme of the Rovaniemi Arctic Spirit 2019 conference which will be held in Rovaniemi, Finland on November 12–13, 2019.

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