Briefing Note

Many Voices, One Arctic: Reflections on Calotte Academy 2026

Olaf Hajnosz

Whenever I think about the lakes of Finland, the fjords of Norway and the magical atmosphere of the north, I can't stop thinking about when I'll go back – a participant at Calotte Academy, three months after returning from the trip.

The Calotte Academy is an annual travelling academic symposium held in June and initiated by Professor Lassi Heininen. During our week in northern Scandinavia, we visited: Rovaniemi, Kiruna, Tromsø, Kautokeino, Hetta, Inari/Ivalo and Sodankylä in three different countries while staying within the borders of Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people. This year's CA2026 expedition focused on the theme of 'intelligence', exploring concepts related to the development of AI, military intelligence, information gathering and processing, and narrative shaping. These deliberations began with a reflection on the opportunities and challenges of the modern world, the effects of which are particularly evident in the Arctic.

During the opening session at the University of Lapland, Professor Lassi Heininen emphasised the importance of dialogue and academic freedom in establishing a lasting foundation for peace. Without these, it is very difficult to foster peace among states and nations. Ensuring the safety of indigenous peoples is also challenging, particularly in the Arctic. As we will discover on our journey through Sápmi, a reindeer herder's perception of security issues differs greatly from that of a resident of Helsinki or Oslo. A discussion on security – its forms, scope and impact (including on academic work) – was the central theme of the presentation by Prof. Matti Nojonen, who described the challenges researchers have faced over the past decade. The key question raised during this presentation was: 'Who defines the national interest?'

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The Arctic is also experiencing significant changes in terms of information. As the ice melts, a flood of articles about the High North is hitting the media. However, content published in the global media often overlooks the local and regional context, focusing solely on attention-grabbing geopolitical headlines such as "Arctic Race" or "Scramble for the Arctic". These narratives were discussed by Olaf Hajnosz during the session "Narratives, Information & Media". Bipandeep Sharma analysed whether scientific knowledge is losing prominence within Arctic geopolitics, while Urban Wråkberg outlined the impact of geopolitical tensions on academic collaboration. Jennifer Rea Fraser focused on the younger generation, who are particularly vulnerable to disinformation about climate change on social media. After the panel, we went for lunch and took part in the first round of the role-play game, which we will continue until the end of the trip. We then boarded the coach, and by evening we had arrived in Kiruna, Sweden.

We began our first day in Sweden with a session entitled "Arctic Networks & Hubs for Intelligence", during which João Bettencourt pointed out that observing the Arctic is not politically neutral, because 'whoever monitors the region exercises power over it'. Evgeni Zarov argued that excluding data sets from Siberia significantly reduces the quality of climate research, rendering it incomplete. Yulia Zaika spoke about the experiences of the FORAS (From the Arctic for the Arctic) project and cooperation with the CIS, BRICS and SCO countries, whilst Heather Nicol described the challenges facing circumpolar education in the face of geopolitical tensions. After the session, we head to the new centre of Kiruna, a town famous for the world's largest underground iron ore mine. This mine is a strategic facility for the European Union due to its rare earth element deposits, including neodymium (Nd) and praseodymium. Mine operations have a significant impact on the lives of local residents and the mine's expansion has forced the relocation of buildings, including a historic church, 3–5 km east. Over 3,000 homes and buildings (including schools, hospitals, shops and the railway station) and 6,000 residents were relocated during this operation. Previously, the expansion of the town and the mine had also forced local reindeer herders to move. We spoke to Anders Karlsson, a member of the Municipal Executive Office, about the impact of the mine on the local community, global economic processes, and securitisation. The academy participants were particularly interested in environmental and financial issues, including compensation for relocation. After touring the town hall and the new centre, we set off on a long journey north to Tromsø in Norway.

The fourth academic session, "Arctic Geopolitics: Sovereignty, Great Powers and Collaboration", took place in the library building in Tromsø. Miyase Christensen began the lecture with a presentation analysing the phenomenon of 'the Arctic as a strategic frontier' – a term that has become widespread in recent years amid growing interest in the region. Kari Roberts then discussed the priorities of Russian foreign policy in the Arctic and their implications for Canada and NATO. Nicholas Glesby spoke about the North Atlantic Alliance as well, describing cooperation between NORAD (North American Aerospace Defence Command) and NATO in the north-western flank Hasan Akintug examined the dynamics of the relationship between the United States and Greenland, while Ville Tiuraniemi outlined the evolution of Arctic geopolicy research. In the third round of the simulation ('Who owns Greenland in June 2026?'), Russia, alongside China and the United States, pressured Greenland, who were valiantly defended by the EU, Denmark, and the island's inhabitants. Environmental organisations raised a number of concerns with the democratic actors, and the artists' representatives present were listened to patiently, though nobody understood their demands. Following an intense exchange of views during the simulation, it was

time to explore Tromsø. At the Northern Norwegian Art Museum, where the simulation took place, we admired beautiful paintings depicting everyday life in the north and landscapes by artists including Frants Diderik Bøe, Franz Wilhelm Schiertz and Christian Due. From Tromsø, we set off for Hetta in Finland, stopping on the way at the Järämä Fortifications – a line of defences built by the Germans in northern Finland to secure the retreat of their troops in 1944.

From Hetta, we set off for Kautokeino, the cultural heart of Sámi life in Norway. Both the Sámi University College (Sámi allaskuvla) and the Sámi National Theatre (Beaivváš) are located here. At the Boaššu/NOMAD Indigenous Food Lab, Anders Oskal warmly welcomed us and talked about the culture and challenges faced by the region's indigenous people. The first session in Kautokeino, "Sámi Knowledge and Security as Parts of Arctic Intelligence", started with Fleur Santenac who discussed the relationship between the Sámi and the government administration, including their dependence on the state, and their right to self-determination in managing natural resources. Eleni Kavvatha focused on the role played by Sámi knowledge in EU governance. Jukka Tarkiainen described how the Sámi perceive Arctic security, while Amanda Graham highlighted the role of higher education in building the capacity of local communities. The final lecture, delivered by Sara Leandra Loosli, offered an insightful analysis of post-anthropocentric empathy and provided a fascinating artistic experience by combining the violin with dance. After enjoying a local meal, we visited Čoarvemátta, where we toured the Sámi High School and the Reindeer Herding School. There, we learnt about the reindeer slaughtering process, which is crucial to the continuation of the Sámi cultural heritage. We also saw how local handicrafts are made and learnt about the timetable for local young people. The second session on Thursday was entitled "Militarisation vs Environmentalisation", during which Kristiane Width shared her observations on daily life near the military bases in Rovaniemi. In his presentation, Antero Eerola highlighted the challenges associated with the region's growing militarisation, whilst Lassi Heininen described the significant threat that military operations pose to the natural environment. After the sessions, we visited Kautokeino, learnt about the work of local research and development institutions, and then returned to Hetta.

On Friday, a session entitled "Intelligence for Sustainability: AI vis-à-vis Law and Ethics" took place at Enontekiö Town Hall. During the session, Tatyana Sarayeva discussed the potential applications of artificial intelligence in managing climate change in the Arctic. Varvara Kut'yina presented the legal aspects of using AI to monitor the Arctic environment, while Marta Koch described how AI can support data management in the High North. Meanwhile, Gerald Zojer outlined the threats to human security in the Arctic arising from the ever-increasing influence of modern technologies, whilst Tatiana Anderson explained how technology can improve medical services in remote areas. Next, we went to Enontekiö Airport, a small airport that plays a significant role in the development of tourism in the region. Last year, it handled over 40,000 passengers, most of whom were UK tourists. The airport's CEO, Jussi Suorsa, gave us a tour, explaining how the airport operates and its importance to the local economy. After lunch, we set off on a four-hour journey to Inari, which is Finland's largest municipality. Upon arriving at the Vasatokka centre in Laavu (Sámi hut) we lit a campfire and spent a magical evening by it in the company of our brilliant violinist, Sara.

During the ninth session, which took place at Inari Town Hall, we discussed the topic of "Energy, Mining & Space". In his talk, Tom Gabriel Royer highlighted the threats to local reindeer-herding

communities posed by the EU's space ambitions. Rehan Tahir Sabbih compared indigenous rights with state policy rationalities, while Andrei Diaconescu described the EU's regulatory approach to energy security in the Arctic. Afterwards, we met with Tommi Kasurinen (kunnanjohtaja, or 'Municipal Manager'), Mari Palolahti (Administrative Director) and Jari Huotari (Chairman), to discuss the development of the municipality and town, particularly the impact of tourism on the environment and economy. After the meeting at the town hall, we visited UTAC Automotive Testing Finland Oy, the largest tyre testing centre in the Arctic. While there, we discussed the technical and economic aspects of the facility's operations and its significance for the region. We then visited a local pub and, in the evening, returned to our base in Vasatokka, where we relaxed by enjoying a traditional sauna and a swim in the lake.

On Sunday, our final day, we had a long journey ahead of us to Rovaniemi, but first we went to Sodankylä to visit the Local Heritage Museum (Sodankylän Kotiseutumuseo). The final round of the simulation took place on the museum grounds. Due to significant differences in how reality was perceived, it was not possible to reach a consensus. However, some progress was made on less controversial issues, such as the need to strengthen environmental protection measures, which was a cause for optimism. After lunch and a tour of Sodankylä town centre, we boarded the coach to Rovaniemi.

I am delighted to share with you my account of this year's Calotte Academy. It is an extraordinary event where an Arctic enthusiast can find everything they need, from expert knowledge and breathtaking landscapes to fascinating people. As a space for dialogue, the Academy encourages conversation with people who often hold very different views on the world, security and politics. This was particularly evident in conversations with individuals from social, cultural, and geopolitical backgrounds that were vastly different from my own. I found myself disagreeing with the views of other participants on numerous occasions, yet every discussion remained based on mutual respect. It seems to me that this was precisely the aim that Lassie Heininen had in mind when he created Calotte Academy. The Academy brings together people with different experiences, areas of expertise, ages and life paths. What unites us is a shared fascination with the Arctic and the belief that the future of this region concerns us all.

I can confidently tell every reader of this year's Briefing Note: be here with us in the summer of 2027!

Join us! See you up north.