**Briefing Note**

# Transnational Scientific Dialogue in a Fragmented Arctic: Discussing Shared Legacies and New Challenges at the XIII Luzin Readings

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*In spring 2026, the XIII International Scientific and Practical Conference "The North and the Arctic in the New Paradigm of Global Development. Luzin Readings – 2026" was hosted by the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The event took place in Apatity, a city in the Murmansk region. The forum included a roundtable "International scientific dialogue in the Arctic in an era of change" which brought together experts from Russia and abroad to discuss the prospects for joint high-latitude research. This discussion was held amidst a breakdown in Russia-West Arctic scientific cooperation. Recent geopolitical shifts had suspended Russian participation in circumpolar collaborative platforms, nearly halting a once-vibrant, long-standing partnership. The commentary highlights roundtable participants' views regarding the need for continued engagement, as well as strategies to sustain an academic dialogue and maintain comprehensive Arctic research within a fractured geopolitical landscape. It emphasizes the necessity to prevent a destructive epistemic divide – which risks reducing Arctic knowledge to disconnected, localized scales of study – and use science diplomacy in order to safeguard the region's sustainable development.*

## The Luzin Readings – An integral part of the history of our scientific cooperation in the Arctic

The conference has been held biennially since 2001 by the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies to honour its founder and first director, Gennady Luzin. From the 1980s and until his untimely passing in 2000, he was a leading Russian scholar of Arctic socio-economic development, as well as a State Duma Deputy elected in 1999.

The Luzin Readings of 2026 were dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the Institute and 90 years since Gennady Luzin's birth. The conference gathered 300 participants and featured over 100

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presentations across plenary and breakout sessions, the School for Young Arctic Researchers, and two roundtables – reflecting a high interest in Arctic issues among scientific, expert, and educational communities. The sessions covered four key themes: (a) sustainable nature management and industrial development in the Arctic under global challenges; (b) social, economic and financial processes in the Arctic with a focus on modern solutions and the role of subarctic regions; (c) maritime Arctic communications; (d) municipal and urban management, including Arctic tourism, creative industries, and infrastructure. Events for young researchers included the student and postgraduate session "Prospects for developing the Russian Arctic in new geoeconomic conditions", and the School of Young Arctic Researchers themed "Russia's complex space: how not to lose it in our development strategies?", both co-hosted by the Murmansk Arctic University branch in Apatity.

Historically, the conference has maintained strong international participation, at times drawing over forty researchers from the Arctic states to this forum. Professor Lassi Heininen, a friend of Gennady Luzin and a longtime collaborator of the Institute, noted in his plenary video address that *"the conference bearing Luzin's name serves as an integral part of the history of our scientific cooperation in the Arctic"*. Under changing geopolitics, the 2026 Luzin Readings aimed to preserve circumpolar dialogue through organizing a dedicated expert roundtable.

## Insights from the roundtable

The event opened on the morning of April 24, 2026, in a hybrid format. The discussion brought together about 30 experts, including scholars from the Kola Science Centre RAS (representing the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies and the Institute of North Industrial Ecology Problems), St. Petersburg State University, the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), and other Russian institutions. International participation included researchers from Sweden, Finland, Cameroon, and Turkey, representing the Social Science Program of the Polar Regions, the Northern Policy Society and the Calotte Academy, Cameroon's Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation, and the Fourth International Conference on Arctic Research Planning (ICARP IV) Research Priority Team on Arctic Research Cooperation and Diplomacy.

The discussion was moderated by Larissa Riabova, Deputy Director for Research at the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Centre RAS (IES), and Yulia Zaika, Head of the International Department at the Kola Science Centre and Senior Researcher at the IES.

Opening the discussion, Larissa Riabova highlighted Gennady Luzin's contribution to establishing Russia-West dialogue in the Arctic in the 1980s and 1990s, and the Institute's work in this area. Over nearly 40 years, the IES has implemented more than 60 circumpolar projects, building a substantial institutional legacy of Arctic cooperation. Many addressed the needs of Arctic residents, including public health, strategies for coping with global challenges in fishery-based communities, and the sustainable development of mining towns. Others focused on expanding scientific networks. For instance, since 1996, the IES has partnered with the Calotte Academy – a unique school of Arctic dialogue – hosting its annual trips to the Murmansk region. Decades of collaborative work built strong ties between Russian scholars and the international Arctic research community, fostering a mutual trust now tested by geopolitical pressures.

She noted that legacy networks now act as an operational but fragile buffer. Informal ties between individuals, together with minimal residual interactions within formal structures, serve as the

remaining viable channels for scientific contact. However, these links are increasingly at risk due to rising geopolitical tensions and a swift generational change, as a new cohort of researchers enters the field with no firsthand experience of Russia-West Arctic cooperation. Given these risks, she stressed that maintaining scientific dialogue in the Arctic is critical both for preserving research continuity and for ensuring regional sustainability.

Next, Yulia Zaika furthered the agenda with a presentation entitled "Can the Fifth International Polar Year become an engaging link in the international scientific dialogue in the Arctic (at the poles)?". Yulia underscored the importance of such exchange, emphasizing that the Arctic is not only a strategic economic zone but also a vital arena for scholarly research, which has historically been comprehensive and international in nature. Highlighting the International Polar Year (IPY) as a premier global scientific initiative, she, as a member of the International Arctic Science Committee Secretariat, detailed preparations for IPY5 (2032-2033) and expressed hope that this process will become an inclusive endeavor capable of uniting Arctic researchers.

Yulia Zaika outlined ongoing local initiatives by the Kola Science Centre and the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies – including publications, events, and projects – aimed at finding ways to sustain international scientific dialogue amidst the geopolitical crisis. Specifically, she shared an update on the progress of the project "From the Arctic for the Arctic: Science Diplomacy for a Sustainable Future for the Region and Its People – FORAS". This initiative is being implemented from 2025 to 2028 under the auspices of UNESCO by the International Department of the Kola Science Centre and the Luzin Institute for Economic Studies as part of the UN International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development.

Urban Wråkberg, Professor (ret.) of Northern Studies, a member of the Social Science Program of the Polar Regions (Sweden), shared his thoughts online. In his presentation, "International collaboration as a basis for science and scholarship on the Arctic: a historical perspective", he examined the history of relations within the International Polar Year framework through the prism of science diplomacy principles, as well as 19th-century Russian-Swedish cooperation on the Svalbard archipelago. He also highlighted the involvement of Indigenous Peoples in Arctic research, negotiations on the Exclusive Economic Zone in the Barents Sea, and tourism development on Svalbard. Throughout his presentation, he demonstrated how scientific networks have historically survived political friction, arguing that science diplomacy helps mitigate tensions and foster collective solutions to global challenges.

Professor Wråkberg maintained that international cooperation and joint field research in the Arctic are not an academic privilege, but a necessity and a direct responsibility of scientists, guaranteeing the reliability and relevance of expertise in the region. Curtailing joint research in certain regions or with specific countries inevitably compromises the quality of findings and slows scientific progress. Therefore, cross-border scholarly dialogue in the Arctic must be supported, especially in times of crisis.

Professor Lassi Heininen from Finland, Editor of the Arctic Yearbook, a key representative of the Northern Policy Society and the founder-leader of the Calotte Academy, in his virtual talk addressed the dilemma between the role of science – solving specific problems and research tasks – and academic freedom. He noted that politicians often fail to understand the fundamental nature of science and stated, *"Science is universal, like music; it has no boundaries, but science is not free these days"*. He cited past Euro-Russian cooperation, noting common interests, and energy and ecological

projects that are now stalled. Reflecting on post-Cold War green cooperation, he stressed that today, shared interests – first of all, environmental protection – can ground a renewed dialogue. He emphasized the importance of understanding the motivation for cooperation by asking, "Why are we doing it?" and asserted, *"We must, first and foremost, think about the Arctic itself"* and our mutual interests in preserving this unique, vulnerable region.

Professor Heininen concluded that science is an international endeavor, *"A work we must do together"*, and at present, science generally and Arctic research particularly can play a vital role in restoring trust based on cooperation. He stressed the need to maintain cooperation in the Arctic across nations, share information, and jointly analyze it, particularly concerning the climate crisis and permafrost thaw, especially ahead of the Fifth International Polar Year. He underscored that it is crucial to keep contacts – the most important factor for the future of science – and to preserve freedom of academic opinion, as well as to support young scientists.

For the Russian side, an important area for developing Arctic scientific dialogue is the diversification of its geography, including countries where mutual interests are not always obvious. In 2025, the Kola Science Centre began collaboration with Cameroon, holding several meetings and a seminar titled "Where the Arctic meets Africa". Jules-Marcel Kechanga, a Researcher at Cameroon's Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation and Head of the Patent Office, joined the roundtable online. He highlighted the importance of establishing cooperation, particularly for knowledge exchange on sustainable lifestyles in extreme environments, such as the Arctic and African deserts. Supporting previous speakers on the need for free scientific discourse, Jules-Marcel Kechanga emphasized that Africa has much to share with the Arctic region, as African communities offer valuable insights into adapting to extreme and changing environmental conditions. Finally, he expressed hope for future collaboration with the Kola Science Centre, particularly through joint initiatives with institutes and between young scientists.

The roundtable included a written contribution by Dr. Onur Limon, an independent researcher from Turkey and a member of the ICARP IV Research Priority Team on Arctic Research Cooperation and Diplomacy. He argued the current situation offers a lesson: while challenges are well understood, they are often approached with overly familiar solutions: *"Perhaps the problem is that we are trying to maintain a traditional model of cooperation in a changed environment"*. In his view, if the Fifth International Polar Year is to differentiate itself from other initiatives, a realistic rethinking of collaborative structures is necessary. More flexible, multi-channel, and disruption-resistant models of scientific engagement must be developed, abandoning systems that rely on a single institutional structure or a limited group of countries. Onur Limon advocated for alternative communication channels and data exchange structures based on open networks that allow diverse participants to be engaged, and noted that this approach would help ensure the continuation of academic collaboration during periods of political tension.

The discussion was joined in person by Alexander Sergunin, Professor in the Department of Theory and History of International Relations at St. Petersburg State University, and Andrey Krivorotov, Acting Head of the Innovation Management Department at the Odintsovo Branch of MGIMO University. As long-term participants in Arctic cooperation, they both emphasized the importance of international partnerships for the advancement of Arctic research and the need for continued academic dialogue, including among young scientists.

The presentations sparked significant interest, drawing questions from the participants. The discussion revolved around the risk of an epistemic divide in Arctic research as Russia-West tensions halt joint projects and expeditions, isolating regional datasets. Participants noted that this geopolitical clash risks reducing Arctic knowledge to disconnected, localized studies, making pan-Arctic synthesis difficult, if not impossible.

## Concluding remarks

The roundtable dialogue led to the understanding that navigation in today's fractured geopolitical landscape requires scientific pragmatism. Sustaining Russia-West scientific dialogue in the Arctic is vital and requires flexible, multi-channel connections. Supported primarily from the bottom up by researchers themselves, these connections, mainly based on legacy networks, now serve as the essential platform where science diplomacy operates at the expert level.

The current state of geopolitics points to a functional approach as both a justification for cooperation and a realistic model for its survival. This approach treats objective scientific expertise as a key asset that must be kept separate from geopolitical agendas, at least within substantive domains vitally important for the Arctic itself. Under this pragmatic model, it is logical to focus Russia-West Arctic scientific cooperation on core fields such as climate change, permafrost thaw, ecological security, and other issues critical to the region's sustainable development. Besides external factors, the implementation of this model depends on the resilience of legacy networks and the ability of current science diplomacy to evolve them into inclusive, horizontal frameworks for addressing shared circumpolar and global challenges in the Arctic on the basis of mutual benefit.

To achieve this, specific modes of engagement between Russian and Western researchers can be used more extensively through multilateral platforms like UNESCO and the upcoming Fifth International Polar Year. Parallel to this, advancing collaboration through targeted scientific conferences would help to support existing ties and involve the younger generation. Activating these practical pathways is essential to prevent a destructive epistemic divide, maintain comprehensive Arctic research, and safeguard the region's sustainable future.