

Geir Hønneland

East-west collaboration in the European north

Structures and perceptions

Since the end of the Cold War, a flourishing network of collaboration has grown up between Russia and its neighbouring Nordic countries in the European north. The Barents Euro-Arctic region (BEAR) was established in 1993 by several north European states and regional administrative entities in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Its aim is to promote relations across the old east-west divide in the European north, and to enable joint projects in such areas as trade and industry, student exchanges, and indigenous issues.¹ In addition, Russia and the Nordic countries are pursuing various bilateral schemes focused on a particular problem or challenge in the north. One of them is the joint Norwegian-Russian fisheries commission, which manages the valuable fish resources in the Barents Sea. In various bilateral and multilateral partnerships, western states are working to address the environmental problems on the Kola Peninsula. This article gives a brief

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¹ BEAR is surrounded by, and partly integrated with, similar international initiatives in the Arctic: the Arctic Council at circumpolar level and the Council of Baltic Sea States and the EU northern dimension at the regional level.

overview of these cooperative arrangements and Russian perceptions of them.²

THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC REGION

The idea of a Barents region was first aired by Thorvald Stoltenberg in April 1992 when he was Norwegian minister of foreign affairs. After consultations with Russia and the other Nordic states, BEAR was established by the Kirkenes declaration of January 1993, whereby Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia pledged to work together at both the regional and national levels. At the regional level, BEAR initially included the three northernmost counties of Norway, Norrbotten in Sweden, Lapland in Finland, Murmansk and Arkhangelsk Oblasts and the Republic of Karelia in Russia. They were joined in 1997 by Nenets autonomous Okrug, located within Arkhangelsk Oblast, which became a member in its own right, and later by Västerbotten (Sweden), Oulu and Kainuu (Finland), and the Republic of Komi (Russia). All these regional entities are represented on the regional council of BEAR, as are the indigenous peoples of the region.³ The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, on which Denmark, Iceland, and the European Commission sit in addition to the four core states, was created to promote and facilitate intergovernmental cooperation. The following countries have observer status: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the UK, and the United States.

BEAR was designed to promote stability and prosperity in the area and its aims are described by the concepts of normalization, stabilization, and regionalization. It works, for example, to reduce military tension, allay the environmental threat, and narrow the east–west gap in standards of living in the region. It is also involved in the regionalization process underway in Europe as well as in the Arctic, turning previously peripheral border areas into places where governments can meet in a transnational forum serving a diversity of interests. Areas of particular concern are environmental

2 The article builds on the author's personal interviews with Russian and Norwegian actors, primarily civil servants and scientists, for a number of different research projects over the last decade. The first part of the article builds partly on Geir Hønneland, "Cross-border cooperation in the north: The case of north-west Russia," in Elana Wilson Rowe, ed., *Russia and the North* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009), 35-52.

3 The Sámi are the only indigenous people found in all four countries in the region. On the Russian side, the Nenets in Nenets autonomous Okrug and the Veps in the Republic of Karelia also enjoy status as indigenous peoples.

protection, regional infrastructure, economic cooperation, science and technology, culture, tourism, health care, and the indigenous peoples of region.

One of the most striking features of east-west relations of the European north following the end of the Cold War has been the massive flow of people in both directions across country borders, some of whom decide to settle for good in the new country. Annual crossings between Norway and Russia increased from over 3000 in the early 1990s to nearly 110,000 by the mid-2000s.⁴ East-west tourism is thriving; political and business delegations frequently visit partners on the other side of the border; students visit for longer or shorter periods; and finally, most of the towns on the Nordic side of the border are home to Russian communities of various sizes. Many Russians have married Scandinavians and have become eligible for permanent residence permits; other newcomers have come as a result of numerous exchange programs run by BEAR, obtaining temporary residence and work permits on account of their special qualifications.

As a political project, BEAR has had its ups and downs.⁵ While ambitions were high during the formative years, creating viable cross-border business partnerships in the Barents region turned out to be more difficult than anticipated. Ostensible successes ended in failure. In some notorious cases, the Russians simply forced their western counterparts out when their joint companies started to make a profit.⁶ As a result, BEAR downgraded business cooperation as a priority in the late 1990s, devoting its energy instead to people-to-people cooperation—student exchanges, cultural projects, and other ventures bringing Russians and nationals of the Nordic countries together. BEAR set up a Barents health program in 1999, focusing primarily on new and resurgent communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. Both people-to-people cooperation and the Barents health

4 “Interesser, ansvar og muligheter: Hovedlinjer in norsk utenrikspolitikk” (Interests, responsibilities, possibilities: Main directions in Norwegian foreign policy), Norwegian government white paper 15, 2008-09, 49, www.regjeringen.no.

5 A discussion of BEAR cooperation at the time it was established can be found in Olav Schram Stokke, and Ola Tunander, eds., *The Barents Region: Cooperation in Arctic Europe* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994). The achievements of the collaboration a decade later can be found in Olav Schram Stokke and Geir Hønneland, *International Cooperation and Arctic Governance: Regime Effectiveness and Northern Region Building* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

6 See Geir Hønneland, *Barentsbrytninger: Norsk nordområdepolitikk etter den kalde krigen* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 2005).

program are generally judged to be successful, and cooperation between small businesses is also growing.⁷

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

A joint Norwegian-Soviet commission on environmental protection was established in 1988. The year before, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had held his famous “Murmansk speech,” in which he urged the “civilization” of the militarized European Arctic in general, and wider international cooperation on environmental protection in particular.⁸ The Soviet Pechenganikel nickel smelter had already ravaged the countryside on the Kola Peninsula (with visible damage also on the Norwegian side), and the commission made it a top priority during the first few years of its existence to modernize Pechenganikel and reduce sulphur dioxide emissions. By the early 1990s, nuclear safety was the new priority. By then, it was public knowledge that the Soviets had been dumping radioactive waste in the Barents and Kara seas because they were overwhelmed by the ever-growing stockpile of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste on the Kola Peninsula. There was also mounting concern about the safety at the Kola nuclear power plant, located in Polyarnye Zori in the south of the peninsula. Norway launched a plan of action on nuclear safety in northwest Russia in 1995, and three years later a separate joint Norwegian-Russian commission on nuclear safety was established. Norway spent around US\$150 million on nuclear safety projects on the Kola Peninsula over the next 10 years. The plan of action was intended to protect public health, the environment, and business from radioactive contamination and pollution from chemical weapons. It addressed four defined areas: safety measures at nuclear facilities; the management, storage, and disposal of radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel; research and monitoring of radioactive pollution; and arms-related environmental hazards. The immediate priority was to make

7 For further discussions of BEAR achievements, see Geir Hønneland, *Russia and the West: Environmental Cooperation and Conflict* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); and Stokke and Hønneland, *International Cooperation and Arctic Governance*. A thorough discussion of health cooperation between Russia and the Nordic states in the European north is found in Geir Hønneland and Lars Rowe, *Health As International Politics: Combating Communicable Diseases in the Baltic Sea Region* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

8 See Kristian Åtland, “Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk initiative, and the desecuritization of interstate relations in the Arctic,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 43, no. 3 (2008): 289-311.

the Kola nuclear power plant safe, to investigate and report on pollution in northern ocean areas, and to hasten the construction of storage and effluent treatment facilities for radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel.⁹ Since the turn of the millennium, emphasis has been on preparing for the removal of nuclear waste from the northern fleet's old storage facility in Andreeva Bay, replacing the old radioisotope thermoelectric generators used in navigation buoys with environmentally friendly solar cells, and enabling Russians to maintain progress in dismantling nuclear submarines at the Kola Peninsula naval shipyard.

Along with bilateral cooperation with Russia, the Norwegian government invited other western countries to join a multilateral nuclear safety scheme for northwest Russia. In 2002, the G8 countries pledged up to US\$20 billion for a global partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction. Among the G8 priorities were the dismantlement of decommissioned nuclear submarines, particularly on the Kola Peninsula. The framework agreement on a multilateral nuclear environmental program for the Russian Federation, signed in May 2003 and covering, *inter alia*, taxation and liability issues, further enhanced international nuclear remedial cooperation in the region. Another major multilateral cooperation structure, initiated by Norway in 1996, is the Arctic military environmental cooperation agreement between Norway, Russia, the UK (from 2003), and the United States. The initiative is directed towards military-related environmental issues in the Arctic, and primarily the decommissioning of nuclear submarines on the Kola Peninsula.¹⁰ The EU northern dimension environmental partnership, launched in 2001, mainly concentrates on environmental problems in northwest Russia. This fund supports activities in two areas, nuclear safety and more traditional non-nuclear environmental protection, *i.e.*, water quality, waste management,

9 An evaluation of the plan of action's first years of work can be found in Geir Hønneland and Arild Moe, "Evaluation of the Norwegian plan of action for nuclear safety: Priorities, organization, implementation," Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, 2000. See also Geir Hønneland and Anne-Kristin Jørgensen, *Implementing International Environmental Agreements in Russia* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003).

10 Steven Sawhill, "Cleaning up the Arctic's Cold War legacy: Nuclear waste and Arctic military environmental cooperation," *Cooperation and Conflict* 35, no. 1 (2000): 5-36, discusses the achievements of the first phase of military environmental cooperation. See also Hønneland and Jørgensen, *Implementing International Environmental Agreements*.

and energy efficiency. Some €250 million have so far been pledged to the fund—the hope is to raise €2 billion—two thirds of which are earmarked for nuclear safety projects. The flagship project in the non-nuclear sector aims to upgrade the St Petersburg water supply and wastewater management system, while the decommissioning of the old storage vessel for radioactive waste for the northwest Russian nuclear icebreaker fleet, the *Lepse*, currently moored at Atomflot in Murmansk, is the largest nuclear safety project. Much of the waste on board is classified as damaged fuel stemming mainly from the nuclear-powered icebreaker *Lenin*, which suffered a reactor incident in 1966. The damaged fuel has to be removed by specialized remote-controlled equipment. The vessel itself is also contaminated by radioactivity, and parts of it must be stored as radioactive waste. The project will involve moving the vessel to the Nerpa shipyard on the Kola Peninsula, removing the spent fuel, and dismantling the ship. Project costs are estimated at €43 million.¹¹

While nuclear safety has absorbed most of the money earmarked for the environment under the bilateral environmental agreement between Norway and Russia, the joint Norwegian-Russian commission on environmental protection has been promoting institutional cooperation between the two countries in areas such as pollution control, biodiversity, and the protection of cultural heritage. Institutional cooperation became the hallmark of the commission in the mid-1990s. The commission tried to move beyond solutions to urgent environmental problems to build a workable system of cooperation between Norwegian and Russian environmental institutions. Norway was eager to help Russia strengthen its environmental bureaucracy, not least in the area of specialist competence. The single largest project was the cleaner production program, which trained engineers at Russian enterprises to save resources and reduce waste. Since 2002-03, protecting the marine environment of the Barents Sea has been the main objective of the joint commission.¹² Its initial main priority, the modernization of the Pechenganikel combine, has not materialized. Norway pledged NOK300 million (at the time some US\$50 million) in 1990, but after years of

11 See Nina Tykkynen, “Experiences of environmental cooperation between the Nordic countries and Russia: Lessons learned and the way forward,” in Pami Aalto, Helge Blakkisrud, and Hanna Smith, eds., *The New Northern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood* (Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2008), 71-90.

12 A comprehensive presentation of Norwegian-Russian cooperation on environmental protection can be found in Geir Hønneland and Lars Rowe, *Fra svarte skyer til helleristninger: Norsk-russisk miljøvernssamarbeid gjennom 20 år* (Trondheim: Tapir akademisk forlag, 2008).

planning the project was shelved in 1997. A Finnish initiative was also stillborn. The Norwegian project was revived in 2001, when the Norwegian environment minister and the Russian economic minister signed an agreement on a modernization project that would involve a 90 percent reduction in emissions of sulphur dioxide and heavy metals by 2006-07. Again the outcome is uncertain, to say the least. The owner of the now-privatized smelter, Norilsk Nickel, has little incentive to invest in improving environmental performance, and Russian environmental authorities lack the political power to force the company to do so.¹³

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The Barents Sea contains a great abundance of fish stocks of a variety of species. The most important stock from a commercial point of view is the northeast Atlantic cod, which is by far the largest cod stock in the entire northern Atlantic. When the principle of 200-mile exclusive economic zones was established at the United Nations conference on the law of the sea in 1975, management of the Barents Sea fisheries became a joint responsibility for Norway and the Soviet Union. The Norwegian-Russian management regime for the Barents Sea fish stocks defines objectives and practices for cooperative management between the two states in the fields of research, regulations, and compliance control. The cooperation between Russian/Soviet and Norwegian scientists in the mapping of the Barents Sea fish resources dates back to the 1950s. It is now institutionalized under the framework of the international council for the exploration of the sea. Quota settlement and technical regulation of fisheries are taken care of by the joint Norwegian-Soviet/Russian fisheries commission, which has met annually since 1976. The commission includes members of the two countries' fishery authorities, ministries of foreign affairs, marine scientists, and representatives of fishers' organizations. Most importantly, it sets total allowable catches for the three fish stocks that are defined as joint stocks of the two countries: cod, haddock, and capelin. Cod and haddock are shared on a 50-50 basis, while the capelin quota is shared 60-40 in Norway's

¹³ Less than a decade after the establishment of the new federation, the environmental bureaucracy built up in the final years of Soviet rule was effectively dismantled. The first blow came in 1996, when the ministry of ecology and natural resources was downgraded to a state committee for environmental protection, and the second in 2000, when the state committee for environmental protection, along with the state committee for forestry, was abolished, and its remnants incorporated into the ministry of natural resources.

favour. Finally, cooperation in compliance control was initiated in 1993, after the Norwegian coast guard revealed considerable Russian overfishing following Russian vessels' new practice of delivering most of their catches to Norwegian ports instead of in Murmansk. This collaboration includes the exchange of catch data and inspectors, as well as the harmonization of various enforcement routines.

Three main periods can be distinguished in the 30 years since the bilateral management regime came into force: before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and after the turn of the millennium.¹⁴ Until the early 1990s, discussions in the joint Norwegian-Soviet fisheries commission mainly centred around the size of the quotas and whether the smallest permitted mesh size in nets and the minimum length of fish should be increased. As the Soviet northern fishing fleet was mostly engaged in distant-water fisheries (mainly outside western Africa and South America) and hence not so dependent on the nearby fishing grounds of the Barents Sea, the Soviet party to the commission generally opted for the lower catch recommendations given by the international council, while the Norwegian party in most years pressed quotas upwards. Norway, on the other hand, wanted to increase the lowest permitted size of fish and net mesh, but failed to persuade the Soviets to introduce this regulation measure. The fish are generally smaller in the Soviet/Russian part of the Barents Sea, which explains the Soviet/Russian unwillingness to increase the mesh size as it would likely result in a smaller Russian catch.

The 1990s were characterized by a large-scale introduction of new, and coordination of existing, technical management measures (e.g., the joint introduction of satellite tracking and of selection grids in trawls) and general agreement about the annual total allowable catch levels. The Russians had now become more interested in the valuable cod stock—in Soviet times, they had been more concerned with quantities than global-market prices—and were more dependent on the Barents Sea fisheries as distant-waters fishing was discontinued in the post-Soviet period. But the northeast Arctic

¹⁴ This distinction is applied in Geir Hønneland, *Kvotekamp og kyststatssolidaritet: Norsk-russisk fiskeriforvaltning gjennom 30 år* (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2006). The Barents Sea fisheries management regime is further discussed in, among others, Odd Nakken, "Past, present and future exploitation and management of marine resources in the Barents Sea and adjacent areas," *Fisheries Research* 37, nos. 1-3 (1998): 25-35; and Olav Schram Stokke, "Managing fisheries in the Barents Sea loophole: Interplay with the UN fish stocks agreement," *Ocean Development and International Law* 32, no. 3 (2001): 241-62.

cod stock was very healthy throughout the 1990s, so total catches could be set at comfortable levels without setting the international council's scientific recommendations aside. New problems emerged—both from a biological and an institutional point of view—when the cod stock began to reach crisis levels around the turn of the millennium.

The decline of the cod stock in the late 1990s coincided with the recognition internationally of the precautionary principle, which maintains that lack of scientific certainty should not be used as a reason not to undertake management measures that could prevent degradation. It was adopted by the international council and the joint Norwegian-Russian fisheries commission in the late 1990s. At the turn of the millennium, the international council recommended drastic reductions in the Barents Sea cod quota, but the Norwegian-Russian commission established annual quotas far above these recommendations. The Russian party strongly opposed the need for implementing quota reductions. The Norwegian party generally supported the scientific recommendations although opinions varied within the Norwegian fishing industry. In 2000, the parties for the first time agreed on a three-year quota. This gave them some breathing space and a buffer against sudden developments. Two years later, the joint commission devised a fresh set of decision and action rules for management of the northeast Arctic cod stock, aimed at ensuring biological viability and greater economic predictability for fishery-dependent communities in Norway and Russia. These action rules said, among other things, that average fish mortality should be kept below the precautionary limit over three-year periods, and that the total allowable catch should not change more than 10 percent from one year to another.

Russian overfishing after the breakup of the Soviet enforcement system was presumably brought to a halt by the measures introduced under the enforcement cooperation scheme between Norway and Russia in 1993. However, though the exchange of catch-and-landing data between the two countries might be a necessary factor in eliminating catch underreporting, it is hardly a sufficient one. Sanctioning mechanisms in Russia, and the sincerity of Russian officials' wish to eliminate overfishing, are uncertain elements in this respect. Further, catches once again were delivered to transport vessels at sea from the late 1990s onward, as they had been in Soviet days. While fresh fish in the intervening period was brought to Norwegian ports, fishing vessels now handed the fish over to transport vessels as frozen products for delivery to European countries, mainly Denmark, the Netherlands, UK, Portugal, and Spain. As a result, the catch-data exchange

system of Norwegian and Russian enforcement authorities was no longer of much use. Two specific questions emerged: how much fish was being transferred from vessel to vessel in the Barents Sea, and how much of these fish products was being delivered to third countries? Seen from the point of view of Norwegian fisheries management authorities, the Russians have not been particularly eager to help with either endeavour. In 2002-03, the Norwegian directorate of fisheries increased its efforts to estimate actual Russian catches in the Barents Sea. Based on the results, the international council for the exploration of the seas estimated annual overfishing to be in the range of 25-40 percent of the total allowable catch between 2002 and 2005. Since then, the estimated overfishing has been reduced.

RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS

I have elsewhere characterized the first few years of post-Cold War international collaboration in the European north in terms of “Barents euphoria.”¹⁵ There was a pervading sense of optimism in both east and west: the Cold War was over, the Iron Curtain gone, and the Russian northerners could—with a little help from their Nordic friends—again be included in the “natural” brotherhood of the European Arctic peoples. Political positions in Russia were to a large extent filled by “westernizers”; the country was in dire economic straits; and the Nordic governments queued up at the border loaded with money to help Russia renew itself (hopefully, perhaps, on a Scandinavian model). The Russians gladly accepted support from the west to strengthen democracy and civil society and reform the economy under the BEAR agreement. The assistance of western governments, through a variety of international environmental regimes aimed at helping Russia rid itself of aging nuclear submarines, secure nuclear installations, and handle nuclear waste, was also welcomed. Indeed, the partnerships with the Nordic countries were generally well received, particularly at expert level.

The winds changed towards the end of the 1990s. The Russians were no longer willing to accept any solution proposed by the west. For the Norwegians, it was particularly evident in the joint management of the fisheries. Whereas the Norwegian discourse focused on short vs. long-term interests of different types of vessels and regions, the Russian discourse saw the establishment of quotas for Barents Sea cod as a battle between the two states. Norway, it was assumed, had “instructed” its western allies in the international council to lower the Barents Sea cod quota in order to harm

15 Hønneland, *Russia and the West*, 100-01, 121-23.

Russia, which was already facing an economic downturn. Norway was seen as a strictly rational actor, capable of calculating the value of its own interests precisely and minutely (because it knew exactly what its best interests were). The interests of the two states were considered to be completely at odds, and quota-setting was seen to be a zero-sum game in which one party could only win what the other party lost. According to this view, states are always seeking to destroy rivals and maximize their own chances of success. As expressed by Murmansk Oblast Governor Yuriy Yedvokimov, “It is always like this: when one state is temporarily weakened, its neighbours will try to take advantage.”¹⁶ A Russian fisheries newspaper commented, “[t]here is nothing special about this—every country defends its own interest with the means available to it.”¹⁷ Or, as expressed by a Russian fisheries researcher in an interview, pinpointing the Russian perception of the quota establishment exercise as a zero-sum game, “[o]f course, it’s in Norway’s interest to ruin Russia. This is simple economic theory.”¹⁸

The Russian discourses on marine living resources in the Barents Sea during the 1990s form part of a general Russian discourse on the country’s relations with the west, what I have earlier labelled the “Cold Peace discourse.”¹⁹ The term refers to the mounting sense of disappointment in the west felt by many Russians from the early and mid-1990s, as it became increasingly clear that the political and economic reforms were not bringing the results for which many had hoped. Combined with a sense of resentment against NATO’s expansion eastwards, and the 1999 NATO intervention in Kosovo, many Russians became convinced that the cooperative attitude of the west at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was false, a way to press reforms on Russia that were bound to fail. The motive of western powers was allegedly to weaken Russia even further while, at the same time, taking advantage of the situation to boost their own military and economic power. The process was conducted under “positive” slogans such as “democratization” and “introduction of market reforms,” but many Russians came to see it as little more than a continuation of the Cold War

16 “Russland og vernesonen: retorikk vs. realiteter” (Russia and the protection zone: rhetoric vs. reality), *Nordlys*, 12 June 2001, 3, www.nordlys.no.

17 “Rossiia-Norvegija: sotrudnichestvo v 21-om veke” (Russia-Norway: cooperation in the 21st century), *Rybatiskiye novosti*, no. 3-4, 2001, 1.

18 Interview with Russian fisheries scientist, Murmansk, October 2000.

19 Hønneland, *Russia and the West*, 74-77. 108-09.

east-west struggle.²⁰ By the end of the decade, many had become disillusioned with the west and instead sought answers in “traditional” patriotic values. As expressed by the leader of the Murmansk regional дума commission on patriotic upbringing in 1999:

After some years of liberal reform...the concept [of patriotism] is again attracting lively interest. To an increasing extent, the ranks of patriots are swelled by those who only recently were indifferent to the national interests of the state, trying instead to convince us of the importance of certain abstract universal human values.²¹

Suspicion of western motives was also evident in discussions over nuclear safety cooperation and environmental issues more widely, especially where western nongovernmental organizations were involved. A former northern fleet officer, Aleksandr Nikitin, was arrested in February 1996 on a charge of spying while assembling data for a report on the nuclear risk on behalf of the Norwegian environmental organization Bellona.²² There was a view that the west uses environmental collaboration with Russia (often channelled through NGOs) for intelligence purposes, demonstrated by, for example, a news bulletin from Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty bearing the headline “Murmansk: A hotbed of foreign spies”:

Foreign intelligence services have targeted Murmansk Oblast as a ‘priority’ area for their activities, Nikolai Zharkov, head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) directorate in Murmansk Oblast, told Interfax North-West on 28 December.... Zharkov also revealed that foreign governments frequently ‘pursue their own interests’ under the cover of environmental organizations.²³

20 A western critique of the reforms inspired by the west is found in Stephen F. Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2000). Cohen coined the term “cold peace” in an article first published in 1992.

21 “Patriotizm—konkretnoe chuvstvo” (“Patriotism is a concrete feeling”), *Polyarnaya pravda*, 10 March 1999, 2. For a discussion of the revival of patriotic values in Murmansk Oblast at the end of the 1990s, see Geir Hønneland and Anne-Kristin Jørgensen, *Integration vs. Autonomy: Civil-Military Relations on the Kola Peninsula* (Aldershot and Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1999), 167-68.

22 He was held in custody for 10 months and acquitted in April 2000.

23 *Newsline*, Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty, 30 December 2000.

As noted above, Russians appear to approach international politics as a zero-sum game between states. What one state wins, other states lose. It will always be in a state's interest to harm other states, even without the prospect of actually gaining much from the exercise. In an interview for an evaluation of western health initiatives in northwest Russia, an elderly Russian doctor wondered about the motives of western governments: "Why are they so interested in us? What is their hidden agenda?" He indicated the direction of his suspicions: "Every country's ministry of foreign affairs is a legal intelligence agency." Nordic governments were therefore invading yet another sector to exploit Russian expertise and pressure Russia to make reforms.²⁴ And there's an anecdote about a Norwegian minister of fisheries who, in the early 2000s, met his Russian counterpart. The Russian allegedly said to the Norwegian: "You do everything you can to destroy the Russian fishing industry. And I respect you for that." Again, it is the simple duty of a politician to work against the interests of other states, because this is always for the good of one's own.

International relations were also an issue when Yuriy Yevdokimov was ousted in spring 2009, well into his fourth period as governor of Murmansk Oblast. While the Kremlin probably wanted to get rid of him for internal political or possibly financial reasons, it was arguably easier to explain the move to the public by evoking xenophobic sentiments.²⁵ As the *BarentsObserver* reported, President Medvedev gave Yevdokimov "one last warning" and told him to concentrate on solving domestic problems instead of "fooling around abroad." That warning came just few days after the governor had been in Norway to sign a cooperation agreement with the Norwegian county of Troms. After that, the first deputy head of the United Russia's executive committee, Valery Galchenko, told journalists that Yevdokimov was "betraying Russian interests" in the Arctic and that he wanted to "detach the region from Russia and give it to Scandinavians and Americans who are fighting for their interests in the Arctic."²⁶

24 Interview with Russian medical worker, St Petersburg, June 2003.

25 According to the *BarentsObserver* ("Why Yevdokimov resigned," 1 April 2009), a senator from Murmansk Oblast, Vyacheslav Popov, called for Yevdokimov to leave his post because he stood in the way of others with commercial interests in the Shtokman project. The official reason for Yevdokimov's resignation was misuse of state funds; see, e.g., "Accounts chamber's revision aimed at replacing Yuri Yevdokimov," *BarentsObserver*, 8 April 2009, www.barentsobserver.com.

26 "Governor Yevdokimov resigns," *BarentsObserver*, 21 March 2009.

CONCLUSION

Moscow's priorities with regard to the international cooperation initiatives involving northwest Russia have varied among functional sectors and over time. BEAR has not been a major concern of Russian foreign policy leadership. This is not to say that Russia has not supported the initiative, but project funding has tended to come from the Nordic side. Cooperation on environmental protection has clearly also been supported by Moscow, but progress has been hampered by the lowered status of the Russian environmental bureaucracy since the turn of the millennium. Not unexpectedly, the highest Russian priority is fisheries management. The joint Norwegian-Russian fisheries commission sets annual quotas for some of the most abundant fish stocks in the world. The fishing industry involves big money, and here a number of Russian actors seek influence, ranging from private ship owners to various bodies of governance on both regional and federal level. Regional authorities in Russia have been cooperative and open to western initiatives, especially as long as project funding is included in the package. Looking at policy statements and public sentiment, however, there is evidence of a change dating from the late 1990s. Little is left of the "Barents euphoria" of the early 1990s, at least on the Russian side of the border. Power agencies and the man in the street seem to agree that western environmental NGOs are up to no good in Russia. The close relationship between the governor in Murmansk Oblast and the Nordic countries was even invoked by the country's political leadership as something suspicious when it wanted the governor removed in spring 2009. That said, sustainable institutional structures have been built up between Russia and the Nordic countries in the Barents Sea region—the fisheries management regime is well into its fourth decade, and the environmental protection regime in its third—so a few ups and downs in the general political atmosphere will hardly lead to new isolation of Russia in the European north.