

Evaluation of the doctoral thesis

Anastasiia Viacheslavovna Sboychakova, *"The Role of the Arctic Council in Forming the Policy of Environmental Safety in the Arctic"*

For degree of Candidate in Political Sciences at Saint-Petersburg State University

Specialization: 23.00.04 – Political problems of International Relations, Global and Regional Development (Political Sciences)

On the theme, and aim of the dissertation

The theme of the dissertation by Anastasiia Viacheslavovna Sboychakova, for a degree of Candidate in Political Sciences, *"The Role of the Arctic Council in Forming the Policy of Environmental Safety in the Arctic"* belongs to Security Studies, and it also deals with Arctic Studies. Following from this, and in this context, it is academically relevant and interesting, and politically timely and important.

In the context of Security Studies the thesis fits well to the discourse on Environmental Security, or actually to that of Comprehensive Security, by having discussion and analysis on different concepts of security. Correspondingly, in Arctic Studies it is easily integrated in studies and discourses on governance and regimes, as well as the role of international cooperation and institutions, in particular the Arctic Council (AC). Following from this, it is possible to interpret that the thesis has a certain (Russian) dualism by combining two approaches: on the one hand, Security Studies, i.e. (re)defining security and actors of security, and on the other hand, (re)framing Arctic cooperation and (re)shaping Arctic politics. As a synthesis or conclusion, it draws up a more comprehensive picture on environmental security in the Arctic in general, and in particular how international established cooperation in the AC is forming that.

The object of the thesis is said to be "the policy of the AC in the field of ensuring environmental safety in the Arctic region", and the aim "to determine the main directions of the Arctic Council's policy in the field of environmental security in the region and highlights its features" (p. 6). There is no mentioned of research questions, but instead, there are seven goals the study aims to solve (p. 6-7).

The methodological framework for the research of the dissertation thesis is said to be "the integrated approach" of first, "soft security" by Galtung, Nye and Wilde, and the securitization theory by Buzan; second, the concept of sustainable development; and third, to investigate the functions of the Arctic Council and assess its role based on the concept of liberal institutionalism by North (p. 11). The used methods are analysis, comparative studies and other scientific methods in modern political sciences. The primary sources of the study are official documents of the Arctic Council and those of its member-states.

Detailed assessment

Introduction: Introduction is short and starts by the relevance of this study, which is obvious. The object of the thesis is put shortly, "the policy of the AC in the field of ensuring environmental safety in the Arctic region". It together with the aim of the study, "to determine the main directions of the Arctic Council's policy in the field of environmental security in the region and highlights its features", as well as the seven goals, give rather good understanding of the main aim of the thesis. Sboychakova does not, however, say

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clearly if her aim is mostly to describe (determine), or have deeper analysis on, the policy and role of the AC ensuring environmental security/safety mentioned of research questions. Previous research on (re)defining of security, including environmental and human security, is briefly discussed (p. 7-11). The Russian scholars are most probably well represent the field, but it is a bit surprise that Sboychakova does not include a few important publications on the field by Western scholars (e.g. Exner-Pirot, Heininen, Hoogenson, Nilsson).

Methodology: Though there are several aspects included "the integrated approach" as the methodological framework for the research, it is neither clearly mentioned what does this "integrated approach" means, and what relations there are between the three aspects of it. Nor there is mentioned what theory/theories the dissertation is based on. The same problem is with the "research methodology", i.e. to present "in the form of analysis, comparative studies, historical method and other general scientific methods used in modern political science and the humanities". When it concerns PhD dissertation you have to be more specific about your methods.

Sources overview: Official documents of the Arctic Council and national policies and strategies of its member-states, i.e. the Arctic states as the primary sources is a solid ground for research. It is however a matter of further thinking if the founding documents of the AEPS and the AC, as well as the declarations of the Arctic Council Ministerial meetings, are enough for deeper analysis on policy-shaping, when issues dealing with Arctic security, as well as the utilization of natural resources affecting environmental safety, are delicate and sensitive, and not always mentioned in official documents.

The structure of the thesis is clear, as well as the division of labor between the three major chapters.

Chapter 1 "Theoretical Framework of Studies on Environmental Safety in the Arctic": The chapter starts by an overview on discussion and discourses on the concept of "security", both internationally and in Russian literature, in International Relations (IR) and Political Sciences, as well as by the United Nations' reports. It allocates much attention to "soft security" and the Copenhagen School of IR, and mentions subjects or actors of security. The review is mostly well done but there is a lack of history, i.e. a few important discourses are not discussed: first, before "soft security", which is very vague concept, there was a powerful discourse on "comprehensive security" by a few UNs reports and papers by a few scholars; second, there is also another discourse, "civil security" which emphasizes the role of citizens and civil societies; third, there is no real discussion about "hard security" and "soft/comprehensive security" from the point of view of national security, and actually the counterpart to "soft security" is "hard security, not "tough security" (see p. 25).

The chapter continues by a review on "environmental safety" in IR theories and world politics, which includes all relevant theories and discourses – well done. I would add the importance of (long-range) air and water pollution – pollution kills millions! – for the original need and establishing the concept of "environmental/ecological security". Here I wonder what is the exact term of the author: either "environmental safety", as is the title and most of the text, or "environmental security", as is the commonly used term in literature?

This is followed by "environmental safety policy in the Arctic" by the Arctic states, as well as its "formation" and "intercommunication with sustainable development". This sounds a well-argued combination and includes an informative overview on national policies of the Arctic states. It strikes me, however, that "environmental awakening" (much due to the Chernobyl and nuclear submarines accidents) is not discussed, not even mentioned, though it was the first trigger for alternative security discourses, such as environmental security and human security. Those concepts were not introduced only due to the "soft power" discourse (see p. 40) but also due to growing concern and activities by citizens and civil societies. Following from this, it would be logical to mention the discourse on "human security" initiated by the Canadian government in the 1990s. What comes to the major difference on security between the Arctic

states based on their national strategies, it is that the five littoral states much emphasize state sovereignty, unlike the three “left-overs” (Finland, Iceland and Sweden) emphasize international cooperation and international treaties as ways to increase security (see Heininen 2011).

Chapter 2 “The Arctic Council and ensuring of environmental safety in the Arctic” is an overview on international (functional) cooperation on environmental protection in the Arctic, as well as the establishment and main structure of the AC. Briefly saying, the main problem of the chapter is that it is too descriptive, in particular when discussing on the “practice of interstate environmental cooperation”. As such the chapter does neither analyze the process of establishing the AC nor the role/importance of environmental safety there. Behind the whole process, which partly started due to the Murmansk speech by Gorbachev, as the author correctly mentions, was much environmental awakening by indigenous peoples (the Saami), environmental movements and scientists/scholars. This put the governments of the Arctic states to act, and initiate the AEPS and later establish the AC, which Canada had proposed already in late of 1980s. There are a few mistakes and gaps in knowledge: 1) In the 1991 meeting it was ministers of the environment of the Arctic states, not foreign ministers, who signed the declaration; 2) The AC meetings mentioned (pp. 58-62) are ministerial meetings of the AC; 3) The most important decision of the Kiruna ministerial in 2013 was to accept new observer countries from Asia – should be mentioned; 4) In Fairbanks in 2017 first time in the history of the AC the foreign ministers of all Arctic states attended – could be mentioned; 5) The EU ban was about sealing (p. 72); 6) To list the criteria of AC observers is rather trivial, if not looking it from the point of view of environmental security/safety; 7) The Arctic Human Development Report was initiated already before 2005 (see p. 85), since the 1st report was published in November 2004 as the other main product of the Icelandic Chairmanship of the AC. It was not about “the conditions of life and well-being Inuit and Saami” (p. 85), but life and well-being in the Arctic region in general including indigenous peoples and others (90% of the inhabitants); 8) Further, very important that the other report was the ACIA (Arctic Climate Impact Assessment) report, the importance of which is not really discussed in the thesis; 9) Finally, as a minor notion: why not to lean on the primary source, not secondary sources (e.g. p. 57).

Chapter 3 “Prospects of the Arctic Council actions for environmental security in Arctic” includes first, a listed (potential) contradictions due to the “conflict between economic development and environmental protection” (p. 90); second, prospects to develop the AC as the main institution for a policy of environmental safety; and third, those of environmental policy of Russia in the Arctic. The content of the chapter is a bit disappointment, since you could expect deeper analysis on how the AC is working for, and has managed, to strengthen environmental security in the Arctic, and how to improve and enhance the capability. The list of (potential) contradictions, because of the conflict between economic development and environmental protection, is only a list of those, and a narrow review on the literature excluding several scholarly papers on the matter. The second part is more analytical, though not unique, and discusses on possible prospects how to develop the AC as the main institution for a policy of environmental safety. This is a discourse, which has been there for some time, though little progress. Many involved in this discussion forgot that the AC was first of all built for international cooperation on environmental protection, which is functional, not necessarily institutional, cooperation. Furthermore, that the AC is for policy-shaping, and in this it has been successful. The last part of the chapter, prospects of environmental policy of Russia does not quite fit here, it could be earlier.

Conclusion: Finally, Sboychakova has her own definition/interpretation of environmental/ecological safety of the Arctic – good. I was only wondering here, if it does include the utilization of natural resources. What comes to the AC, it is possible to distinguish the two periods based on how climate change was taken onto the agenda, and here yes, the ACIA report, published in 2004, was much the division line. Finally, one issue which is not discussed in the dissertation (only briefly mentioned in the conclusions (p. 123), is stability, i.e.

the achieved high geopolitical stability in the Arctic region. It is essential, since it can be interpreted to be a precondition, or prerequisite for environmental security/safety in the Arctic, as is recently discussed (e.g. Heininen 2016, 2018).

List of References: The list of theoretical references is plenty, and there is a good combination of Russian and Western sources. However, a few important publications of Western literature on the field are excluded, as mentioned earlier.

Criteria for a general evaluation

Academically the dissertation is relevant and ambitious to extract the role of the Arctic Council in forming the policy of environmental safety. And thus, promoting environmental security in the Arctic region which is politically timely and important. Here a holistic approach is in particular valuable and creates certain added-value to Security Studies, as well as Arctic Studies. Sboychakova shows maturity when drawing up an overview on discourses on security, in particular environmental security, on the one hand, and on the other hand, international cooperation on Arctic environmental protection, in particular the role of the Arctic Council here.


The structure of the thesis is clear, and mostly logical. The text of the thesis (English) is mostly understandable, though not always, since the language is partly shaky and not precise.

The three main problems of the dissertation are first, there is neither clearly mentioned on what theory/theories the dissertation is based on, nor research methods. The required minimum standards of a PhD degree in IR or Political Sciences is to be specific about your theory/theories and methods. It would be expected to have more systematic and theoretical discussion about security and environmental security. Second, there is neither mentioned research question(s) nor a hypothesis, instead, there are seven goals which are mostly answered, though. This is much the reason is that the dissertation is not analytical enough, instead it is mostly descriptive. In addition, when it comes to the subject of the dissertation there are several gaps in knowledge and mistakes. Third, it does not take into consideration the importance of the high geopolitical stability in the Arctic and does not discuss that as a prerequisite for environmental security/safety.

These are the three major issues, as well as the natural nature of the Arctic Council, which I would like to discuss during the public defense.

Based on my assessment Sboychakova's hardly meets the required minimum standards of a PhD degree in Political Sciences, and therefore I cannot recommend the dissertation "*The Role of the Arctic Council in Forming the Policy of Environmental Safety in the Arctic*" by Anastasiia Viacheslavovna Sboychakova for granting a PhD degree (Candidate in Political Sciences) in International Relations.

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