



To Saint Petersburg State University

Report on the dissertation: “Political and Legal Aspects of Ensuring Environmental Safety in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation”, by Voronchikhina Darya Nikolaeva

I have been invited to write this report on the dissertation “Political and Legal Aspects of Ensuring Environmental Safety in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation” submitted by Voronchikhina Darya Nikolaeva. This thesis meets the requirements for candidate dissertation on speciality 23.00.02 – Political institutions, processes and technologies.

My background for evaluating this dissertation is that I am Professor of Northern Studies and hold the Barents Chair in Politics at the UiT The Arctic University of Norway since November 2014. I have extensive cooperation with Russian colleagues. The Russian Security Council invited me to attend its international high-level Arctic meetings in August 2014 in Naryan-Mar and in September 2015 in Arkhangelsk. Since 2018, I am the founder and coordinator of the Norwegian-Russian PhD-course “Society and Advanced Technology in the Arctic” with Higher School of Economics (Moscow) and Trapeznikov Institute of Control Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences. I do not speak Russian, so I appreciate the high-quality translation of this dissertation, which is easy and clear to read. I commend the translator for this work. I have no previous connection or collaboration with the candidate.

Ms Voronchikhina’s dissertation touches upon a very important topic both for research and policy, environmental safety in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF). The candidate rightly points out that Russia is by far the largest Arctic country, and she explains how the Arctic is particularly important for Russia in areas of transportation, resources, economic development, and defense. Ms Voronchikhina’s research will be important to share with audiences outside Russia, who are often not familiar with the expanse of the Russian Arctic and the extent of Russian Arctic policy. Many outside observers ignore the breadth and challenges of Russian Arctic policy and often focus narrowly on defense developments. The candidate points out that there is not yet a monograph-length study of Russian Arctic environmental security. Ms Voronchikhina gives a comprehensive overview of the environmental challenges in the Russian Arctic, which is informative for outside readers.

The dissertation is organized into Introduction, Chapter 1. Theoretical – methodological bases of political science research of environmental safety of the Arctic region of Russia, Chapter 2. The policy of Russia for ensuring environmental safety in the Arctic region, and Conclusion. The Introduction introduces the importance and novelty of the research as well as the purpose of the research. One criticism of the dissertation is that the research question could be clearer, more purely research oriented and less directed to solving a Russian Arctic environmental policy problem. The purpose of the research is stated as “to study the mechanism of ensuring environmental safety in the Russian Arctic and identify ways of improving its effectiveness.” It is understandable in light of the scale of the problem and its importance, that the candidate wishes to contribute to solutions through her research. She identifies a number of “scientific tasks” to address the purpose of the research. These scientific tasks are valuable and contribute to the state of knowledge. It would have strengthened the dissertation and clarified the candidate’s contribution, if she had formulated a clearer research question and with clear theory-driven hypotheses to test.

In Chapter 1. Theoretical – methodological bases of political science research of environmental safety in the Arctic region of Russia, the candidate first introduces the geographical expanse of the Russian Arctic in a circumpolar context as well as the economic, transportation, strategic and other importance of the Russian Arctic to Russia. Secondly, the candidate provides an overview of Russian and international academic and policy literature on environmental safety. Thirdly, she provides an overview of both Russian and international environmental safety legal instruments. In this chapter, the candidate links the Russian and circumpolar Arctic contexts and Russian and international academic and institutional contexts well.

In Chapter 2. The policy of Russia for ensuring environmental safety in the Arctic region, the candidate covers a large material and gives a comprehensive overview of the empirical material for the topic. The candidate shows that she commands a large material both in terms of historical period and breadth of topics. The candidate shows well the geographical expanse and federal complexities of Russian environmental policy. The dissertation covers important questions concerning the Cold War legacy in the Russian Arctic and the legacy of the USSR as well as the consequences of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR for Russian Arctic environment and society. The candidate links well external international political developments and developments of Russian society and economy with her topic of Russian Arctic environmental safety. This linkage is probably obvious to Russian readers but deserves to be emphasized to an international readership.

The dissertation material concerning nuclear safety is particularly interesting and important to read. Unfortunately, in the West, interest and insight in Arctic nuclear safety and strategic stability has declined significantly since the end of the Cold War with little interest from researchers and students. Ms Voronchikhina's material will make valuable contributions to raise awareness and knowledge about Arctic nuclear safety issues, which gain new relevance with the central role of nuclear energy in the development of the Northern Sea Route and the Russian Arctic, for instance, by means of floating nuclear power stations, as Akademik Lomonosov.

In the Conclusion, the candidate concludes by proposing a number of steps for Russia to improve environmental safety in its Arctic zone by administrative means, economic-technological development, a program of Arctic research, and comprehensive legislation. These suggestions flow from the research in the dissertation. I mentioned concerning the Introduction, that a clearer research question and testable hypotheses would have made the research clearer. Likewise, in the conclusion, matching clearer research findings as basis for policy prescriptions would also have been valuable.

Ms Voronchikhina has covered a large body of Russian and international theoretical and empirical material. She shows command of this theoretical and empirical material and she answers the scientific tasks, she sets out in the Introduction. The candidate makes an important and original contribution to scholarship on the important research and policy topic of Russian Arctic environmental safety. On this basis, I find that this dissertation satisfies the requirements for candidate dissertation on speciality 23.00.02 – Political institutions, processes and technologies.

Sincerely,



Rasmus Gjedssø BERTELSEN, PhD (Cantab)
Professor of Northern Studies, Barents Chair in Politics