

Research Article

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Has Russia heard about the European Union's Arcticness? The EU's Arctic steps as seen from Russia

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Abstract

Ever since 2007/2008, the European Union (EU) and its various institutional actors have been developing a dedicated EU Arctic policy, setting common positions, stressing the EU's Arctic credentials and prominently expressing its own "Arcticness". These Arctic steps have been thoroughly scrutinised over the past decade. Yet, research has almost ignored one particular pillar of the EU's Arctic endeavour: the "Arctic exception" in EU–Russia relations and the related lack of a distinct Russian dimension in the EU's Arctic policy. Similarly, little is known of how the Russian side views the EU's Arctic policy steps taken since 2008. The extensive transdisciplinary literature on EU–Russia relations has basically ignored how the EU has been represented in Russia ever since 1991. This article examines EU and Russian Arctic policies and their relations in the European North. In attempting to explore how the EU's "Arcticness" has been presented, narrated and perceived in Russian media between 2008 and 2018, we draw upon an analysis of articles published on various Russian media platforms during that period. The study identified four core narratives of the EU's engagement in the Arctic: the EU as *player*, as *seeker*, as *prohibitor* and as *partner*. These narratives provide evidence of the "Arctic exception" in EU–Russia relations, as well as offering some related explanations.

Introduction

In 2007, Greenland received several relatively unaccustomed visitors: politicians from the European Union (EU) and its Member States. José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission (hereinafter "Commission"), visited Greenland at the end of June. Then, the Italian prime minister, Romano Prodi, and the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, came in July and August to examine global warming and the melting of Greenland's ice sheet at first hand (Maxeiner, 2007; SpiegelOnline, 2007). Late that same summer, the broader circumpolar North hit the headlines worldwide with a blurry picture of a Russian titanium flag, planted more than 4000 m beneath the North Pole on the floor of the Arctic Ocean. Moreover, predictions of an ice-free Arctic Ocean mushroomed in September 2007 as the extent of its sea ice plummeted to a record 38% below average (Comiso, Parkinson, Gersten, & Stock, 2008, p. 6). These images came to epitomise the Arctic *Zeitgeist*, vividly described and widely shared via an essay in *Foreign Affairs*: "The Arctic Ocean is melting, and it is melting fast (. . .). Global warming has given birth to a new scramble for territory and resources among the five Arctic powers" (Borgerson, 2008, p. 63).

More than 10 years later, debates on the region's future continue, although publicly less focused on conflict over territory and resources, and more on international cooperation and collaboration. More of the Arctic sea ice has melted; continental shelf claims been submitted; the Arctic Council (AC) has convened regularly and numerous Arctic strategies have been published. Today, the once-regionalised Arctic is now viewed globally, although the national policies of the Arctic states decisively influence regional developments (Depledge, 2018, pp. 35–61; Heininen, 2017, p. 441; Keskitalo, 2004). The events of 2007 have also raised Arctic awareness in the corridors of European power. On 14 March 2008, the EU's High Representative and the Commission issued a joint policy document that stated:

The rapid melting of the polar ice caps, in particular, the Arctic, is opening up new waterways and international trade routes. In addition, the increased accessibility of the enormous hydrocarbon resources in the Arctic region is changing the geo-strategic dynamics of the region with potential consequences for international stability and European security interests. (2008, p. 8)

Since then, the EU and its various institutional actors have developed a dedicated EU Arctic policy, setting common positions, stressing the Union's Arctic credentials and prominently expressing its very own "Arcticness" – the multifaceted but intrinsically connected dimensions of EU–Arctic, Arctic–EU entanglement (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 65–85). The EU's multidimensional Arctic presence also gives an indication of the diverse meaning of both the "EU in the

Arctic” and “the EU” as an international actor. “The EU” may signify not only, among other things, a strong market and economy community, a source of regulations and a combination of its three main institutional bodies but also the grouping of its Member States.

These Arctic steps have been widely studied (see, e.g., De Botselier, Piqueres, & Schunz, 2018; Keil & Raspotnik, 2014; Kobza, 2015; Offerdal, 2011; Østhagen, 2013; Raspotnik, 2018; Stępień & Raspotnik, 2015, 2016b, 2016a; Wegge, 2012). Yet, aside from Aalto (2013), scholars have almost ignored one particular pillar of the EU’s Arctic policy endeavour: the “Arctic exception” in EU–Russia relations. From the very beginning, the EU’s Arctic policy steps have lacked a specific Russian dimension – which seems puzzling, given the bilateral economic and resource dependencies, Northern Dimension (ND)-related partnerships, such as the ND Environmental Partnership (NDEP), cross-border cooperation initiatives (e.g. the Kolarctic or Karelia Programmes) and the generally good institutional ties and relations in the European Arctic (Aalto, 2013, p. 101; Browning, 2005; Kuznetsov & Sergunin, 2019; Rafaelsen, 2014). The ND seems almost completely out of step with the larger Arctic initiative, although both are naturally linked, geographically and politically. The reasons may lie in the Eastern Neighbourhood, where the EU (and its Member States) and Russia disagree – to put it mildly – over Russia’s push westwards and related disputes in Ukraine (2006, 2009, 2014–) and Georgia (2008). This is why also the 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy highlights the Arctic as a positive case for selective engagement between the EU and Russia in an otherwise rather tense landscape (High Representative, 2016, p. 33). Perhaps also the very existence of these strong northern regional ties can explain the absence of a specific Russian dimension in EU Arctic documents. Opening the “Russian blackbox” when discussing the Arctic in Brussels and European capitals might lead to broader EU-internal discussion on EU–Russia relations – discussions that could extend beyond the confines of the North/Arctic and might be counterproductive to the otherwise stable and friction-free regional relations between the EU and Russia.

While both the inward-oriented and inside-out perspectives of EU–Arctic (foreign) policy-making have been well analysed, the outside-in approach has been relatively neglected: examination of the EU’s Arctic policy, or its development, from the perspective of the region or country at which the policy is directed – the circumpolar North and Russia. Similarly, Foxall (2017) argues that the voluminous transdisciplinary literature on EU–Russia relations since 1991 has basically ignored how the EU is represented in Russia (but also vice versa). This prompts the question and key objective of our analysis: how has Russian media narrated the EU’s Arctic policy steps since 2008?

We explore how the EU’s Arcticness has been presented and perceived in Russia. This article builds on content analysis of 20 articles published on 15 Russian media platforms (see Annex 1) that have discussed the EU’s involvement in Arctic affairs, covering the period 2008–2018: the first decade of EU Arctic policy-making. During these 10 years, the EU has demonstrated its “actorness” in the Arctic region by, for example, developing its own Arctic policy, applying for observer status and participating in AC meetings, adopting Arctic-related and -affecting regulations as well as providing funding for Arctic research. Our article search covered EU Arctic activities, essentially defined by references to four specific issues of EU–Arctic relevance: (1) the EU’s 10 Arctic policy documents issued from 2008 to 2017 (see Fig. 1), (2) Regulation No 1007/2009 of the European Parliament (EP) and of the

Council of 16 September 2009 on trade in seal products, (3) oil and gas operations in the Arctic, particularly references to Directive 2013/30/EU of 12 June 2013 on safety of offshore oil and gas operations, as well as (4) references to Arctic fisheries and related agreements. By adopting its Regulation 1007/2009, the EU banned seal products, imported for commercial purposes from its internal market. This led to controversial legal and political debate in Arctic international circles, especially with regard to the EU’s broader support of Arctic indigenous issues, eventually negatively affecting the EU’s application for AC observer status (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 91–92; Sellheim, 2015b, 2015a; Wegge, 2013). Directive 2013/30/EU was issued as a reaction to the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon offshore oil-drilling rig in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, which provided a legal framework to ensure uniformly high safety standards for offshore exploration and production activities in EU and elsewhere. The Arctic was mentioned as an area of specific attention, due to its sensitive environment, harsh climate and untapped hydrocarbon resources (European Commission, 2010, p. 12). Yet, although hardly touching the region, but applicable to parties of the European Economic Area (EEA) Agreement, the Directive raised some Arctic eyebrows, especially in Norway (Nilsen, 2012). Concerning the potential opening of fisheries in the High Seas pocket of the Central Arctic Ocean, the EU holds exclusive competence to deal with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities and to negotiate a related regional fisheries management organisation on behalf of its Member States (Koivurova, Kokko, Duyck, Sellheim, & Stępień, 2012, pp. 365–366). In that regard, the EU was invited to join the A5 (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the USA) dialogue on Arctic fisheries in December 2015, which eventually led to the EU becoming one of the contracting partners of the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, formally signed in October 2018 (Schatz, Proelss, & Liu, 2019, p. 196).

In order to identify how the EU’s engagement in the Arctic is interpreted by Russian media and presented to the general audience, we extracted relevant research material from all available open sources following distinct selection criteria: source of media article, language of publication, date of publication, topic and format. Only articles published in Russian and on media platforms registered in Russia were considered to be selected. Moreover, we only chose articles drafted by experts representing the respective media or institutions in Russia. Articles were searched by keywords associated with the four EU–Arctic issues as described above. The time frame was limited to the period of the first decade (2008–2018) of EU Arctic policy-making. Seeking to identify Russian opinions as expressed in publicly available media, the selection of articles was limited to the following formats: editorial, column, opinion and analytical articles. We found the chosen formats suitable for studying the positions of the respective narrators. In other words, we focused on finding and analysing opinions, rather than investigating the main media discourses on the EU and the Arctic in Russia. We believe that this approach enables for a better understanding of how the EU’s engagement in the Arctic was represented in Russian media, rather than being “only” centred around the following discussion of it. The search resulted in 20 articles published on 15 media platforms, 13 of which are various mass media sources targeting a general audience and the remaining 2 platforms that belong to think tanks. Altogether, the selected articles represent a wide range of actors, including governmental and commercial mass media as well as non-governmental and non-profit sources.

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|-------------|---|
| 2008 | HR and Commission Paper, <i>Climate Change and International Security</i> EP Resolution on <i>Arctic governance</i> Commission Communication, <i>The European Union and the Arctic region</i> |
| 2009 | Council Conclusions on <i>Arctic issues</i> |
| 2011 | EP Resolution on <i>A sustainable EU policy for the High North</i> |
| 2012 | Commission and HR Joint Communication, <i>Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps</i> |
| 2014 | EP Resolution on the <i>EU strategy for the Arctic</i> Council Conclusions on <i>Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region</i> |
| 2016 | Commission and HR Joint Communication, <i>An integrated European Union policy for the Arctic</i> Council Conclusions on <i>the Arctic</i> |
| 2017 | EP Resolution on <i>An integrated EU policy for the Arctic</i> |

Fig. 1. EU Arctic policy milestones, 2008–2017.

Source: (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 93)

As our aim was to identify the types of representations found in various Russian media concerning the EU's Arctic engagement, we chose a narrative analysis as most appropriate. This method allowed us to investigate what Russian texts say about the EU in the Arctic and how they portray the EU's efforts towards the region. Narratives represent sources of information on how people construct disparate facts in their own worlds, weaving them together cognitively in order to make sense of reality (Patterson & Monroe, 1998, p. 315). Therefore, narratives can be used to understand media texts and people as political beings. In order to identify these narratives, the following steps were undertaken: (1) finding the narratives; (2) identifying the common themes in each narrative; (3) finding what relationship the narratives have to the four topical issues and (4) looking for commonalities and differences in the narratives. Eventually, the resultant analysis moves towards a reduction of the narration to answer the basic question "what is the point of this story?" In practice, it results in a "core narrative" structure that helps to form a story map and in turn enables cross-case comparison (Richmond, 2002).

We begin by briefly describing the EU's Arctic endeavours of the last decade. This is followed by an overview of EU–Russia relations in the European North, describing in detail the "Arctic exception" in the relationship. Next, we highlight the "European Union exception" in Russia's Arctic policy and conclude by analysing how Russian media has viewed the idea of an "Arctic European Union". In sum, we offer not only a comprehensive synopsis of how and when EU and Russian policymakers have mentioned the respective other in their Arctic policies and strategies but also provide an analysis of how the Union's Arctic steps have been publicly perceived in Russia.

North of the north: the European Union's emerging "Arcticness"

With the events of summer 2007, the Arctic appeared on the EU's "neighbourhood radar". What were seen as the region's changing geostrategic dynamics were assumed to have consequences for European security (High Representative & European Commission, 2008). However, the region has not achieved a prominent place on the EU's domestic or foreign policy table over the last decade(s). At the turn of the millennium, EU–Arctic deliberations lacked momentum, despite strengthened physical regional

presence, for example, through the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) in 1993, the EU accession of Finland and Sweden in 1995 and the related implementation of the ND, and continuing cooperation efforts with Russia (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 87–89). In particular, the ND and its Arctic window could have been used more extensively to raise Arctic awareness within the EU institutional framework in order to secure a place for the region in the EU's political agenda (Weber, 2014, p. 48). However, until 2007, the Arctic remained "a marginal note in EU foreign policy – a periphery of the periphery" (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 91).

The EU is no stranger to the Arctic: it has multiple links to the region, on the geographical, legal, economic, environmental, research and regional development-related levels (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 65–84). Referring to these ties as the "EU's Arctic credentials", a Commission official responsible for Arctic affairs identified the EU as part of the Arctic and as linked to the Arctic. The EU affects and is affected by the Arctic (EU Policy Officer, personal communication, 4 September 2012). However, in contrast to the European North and its many international regimes where the EU is seen as a key partner, the mandate and role for the EU in the Arctic (and the AC) have remained rather limited (Aalto, 2013, p. 102). In order to express the EU's very own "Arcticness", the EU's main institutions – the Commission, the Council of the EU (hereinafter "Council") and the EP – have slowly but steadily developed a dedicated EU Arctic policy and have been setting common positions since 2007/2008. The list of EU Arctic policy documents to date includes 10 policy documents, as well as the above-mentioned joint policy statement on Climate Change and International Security from 14 March 2008 (see Fig. 1). Additionally, the Arctic region has been cross-referenced in, *inter alia*, the Integrated Maritime Policy of 2007, the Maritime Security Strategy of 2014 and, most recently, in the 2016 Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union (Commission of the European Communities, 2007; Council of the European Union, 2014; High Representative, 2016).

On paper, the EU's Arctic approach thus far has encompassed climate change and environmental protection issues, initially embedded in a broader security concept, with a touch of economic considerations (hydrocarbon and raw material resources, maritime transportation and fisheries), regional sustainable development and research, plus a concern for the livelihood of the indigenous

peoples in the European Arctic. However, this terrestrial domain was rather neglected in the first policy documents; only with the 2012 Communication was more emphasis placed on the European Arctic (Stępień & Raspotnik, 2015, p. 434). Basically, all documents have stressed the EU's view of a distinct Arctic role, referring to the EU's moral/normative authority in the fields of climate change, sustainable development, environmental protection and good global governance (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 139). Bluntly put, a global leader in fighting climate change needs to be present in the region most affected by climate change (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 170). Further, all policy documents have examined the various yet distinct relationships between the EU and the "Arctic Eight" (A8), stressing geographical, legal and political proximity: three of the A8 are EU Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden), two are EEA members (Iceland and Norway) and three are strategic partners (Canada, Russia and the USA). Moreover, the EU has strong institutional relations with the A8 via the AC, the BEAC, the EEA, the ND, as well as Greenland's association with the EU as one of its overseas countries and territories. Especially the 2012 Joint Communication highlighted the need to strengthen the bilateral dialogue with its Arctic partners, Canada, Iceland, Norway, Russia and the USA. Yet, although repeatedly referred to as a "strategic partner", the Arctic has been mentioned only in passing in regular meetings held with Canada, Russia and the USA, with no high-level Arctic dialogues or overall (bilateral) Arctic cooperation agenda ever being established (Kobza, 2015, p. 18; Stang, 2016, p. 14). Despite the strong emphasis on bilateral cooperation and Arctic multilateralism expressed in policy writing, actual implementation has given rise to some questions, especially regarding our case at hand: Russia. While, for example, the 2012 Joint Communication included a specific annex on EU-financed joint EU–Russia energy projects, the 2016 document hardly mentions EU–Russia cooperation (Stang, 2016, p. 8).

The European Union meeting Russia, in the European North and beyond

Concerning the "Arctic exception", Aalto (2013, p. 101) observed a "conspicuous lack of EU–Russia co-operation in Arctic policy-making [in an] otherwise highly institutionalized strategic partnership [and] extensive co-operation in the context of northern institutions". This seems rather surprising, as ever since the early 1990s, the EU has assumed an important role in Northern Europe's main intergovernmental institutions, whether the BEAC, the Council of the Baltic Sea States or the Nordic Council of Ministers (Aalto, 2013, pp. 103–104; Myrjord, 2003). Moreover, in September 1997, Finnish Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen officially launched the "Northern Dimension Initiative" (NDI). The NDI was a political attempt at not only institutionally embodying the European North in the EU's policy structure but also raising awareness of this new geographical "centre of gravity" of potential European action – with a new border of more than 1,300 km between the EU and Russia (Aalto, Dalby, & Harle, 2003, p. 7; Lipponen, 1997). With Finland's and Sweden's EU membership, the EU acquired a "natural northern dimension", a broad geographical concept in need of a related policy (Lipponen, 1997, p. 29). The NDI was intended both to help solve problems and to enhance the EU's presence, sensitising the EU to new regional security perspectives in view of its direct border with Russia: energy security issues but also soft security challenges such as environmental issues, nuclear risks and safety, crime prevention and minority rights (Haglund-Morrissey, 2008, p. 203; Heininen, 1998, pp. 30–34; Ojanen, 2000, p. 360; Scott,

2006, pp. 23–24). Moreover, when Lipponen clarified his position on the EU having a distinct policy for its "northern neighbourhood", he also urged the EU to become an AC observer: "The Arctic Council (...) is a new forum that needs to be properly built up (...). It would be only natural to have the EU among the participants, too" (1997, p. 33). Interestingly, this proposal was followed by a proposal from Russia in 1999 that the AC could serve as the EU's "window on to the Arctic" (Arctic Council, 1999, p. 15). Although the EU officially applied for AC observer status in December 2008, the bid has not yet been successful. Canada now supports the EU's application – after years of disagreement due to the EU ban on seal products – Russia remains opposed (Raspotnik, 2018, pp. 91–92).

Until the 2004 round of enlargement, the EU remained largely silent on issues of regional security in the North, although the first form of the EU's ND had been launched already in 1999 (Browning, 2010, p. 407; European Council, 1999). Only after 2004 did the EU begin to view the North as an opportunity of increased regional involvement (Browning, 2010, p. 396). Instead of aiming for a normative transformation of Russia (and the broader region) in line with European norms of liberal democracy, the post-2004 approach was more pragmatic, shifting towards the creation of spaces for interaction over common interests (Browning, 2010, p. 404). Accordingly, the renewed ND of 2006 was viewed as giving the policy a more permanent and political character, to be used as a "political and operational framework for promoting the implementation of the EU–Russia Common Spaces at regional/sub-regional/local level in the North with full participation of Norway and Iceland" (Council of the European Union, 2005, p. 3). This renewed ND strategy transformed Iceland, Norway and Russia from being mere "objects" of the ND to involved "subjects" (Archer & Etzold, 2008, p. 24 and 27). Thus, the ND has been described as a common policy with equal partners used to facilitate intra-regional connections (Heininen, 2017, pp. 436–437). While the East and the South were considered literally as "neighbourhood", interaction with the North was more characterised by a "partnership approach" (Heikkilä, 2006, p. 68). It should be noted, however, that Russia adopted a policy of passive resistance towards the ND after the promised partner status failed to materialise, with the Commission asserting superiority over the other partners (Browning, 2010, p. 409; see also Laine, 2011). Additionally, Northern regional cooperation was not necessarily linked with integration-security issues but rather to the development of regional and cross-border cooperation, aimed at creating spaces for interaction, dialogue and actions on matters of common interest. In that regard, the EU's relationship with Russia has always been considered the main axis in Northern European regional cooperation (Aalto, 2013, p. 104). Whereas other political initiatives have floundered, the ND has been seen as "low-political and technical" (Haukkala, 2010, p. 9) and the European North as a region where divergence in worldviews and commonalities between the EU and Russia, and also internal disagreement among Member States on how to approach Russia, have had less impact – in contrast to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, as observed during the 2014 Ukraine crisis (Cadier, 2018; Ferguson, 2018; Nitoiu, 2016).

However, from the beginning, the EU's Arctic policy steps have lacked a specifically Russian dimension. Indeed, from a circumpolar Arctic perspective, European "blaming by naming" can be observed, one that basically questions Russia's "contradictory" position on Arctic matters – positive signals for European

Arctic cooperation efforts but negative ones in the broader circum-polar format (Internal EP Briefing Paper 2015). In that regard, EU officials have seen Russia as being highly selective concerning the EU's explicit role in the Arctic, often preferring to deal with Member States only (EU Policy Officer, personal communication, 12 July 2013), or been criticised for not being receptive to discussions on sustainable development (EU Policy Officer, personal communication, 27 November 2013). In 2016/2017, the Arctic was framed by the EU as a positive case for selective engagement with Russia in an otherwise rather tense relationship (High Representative, 2016, p. 33), signalling a shift towards limited cooperation between the EU and Russia. However, the broader stalemate, including Russia's position on the EU's pending AC observer status, seems unlikely to end anytime soon (Depledge & Tulupov, 2016). This tenuous (Arctic) relationship between the EU and Russia can be dated back to the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, and particularly the Ukrainian unrest of 2013/2014 (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 92). The related EU sanctions imposed on Russia in 2014 were designed, among other things, to hit Russian economic activity in the Arctic, by prohibiting European actors from engaging in the sale, supply, transfer or export of technology that could be used in offshore oil exploration (Depledge & Tulupov, 2016).

On a more abstract level, Aalto (2013) concluded that Russian sovereignty concerns essentially characterise the Arctic exception in EU–Russia relations. On the one hand, this includes an Arctic perspective and the related role of great-power management of Arctic governance by the A8 – in the sense of “our Arctic only”. On the other hand, Russian sovereignty concerns are related to Russia's general experiences of and with the EU in northern Europe, for example, with regard to the ND, EU–Russia relations as such and the wider area of the EU–Russia neighbourhood in general (Aalto, 2013, p. 117). But how has this exception been expressed in Russian Arctic policy?

The “European Union exception” in Russian Arctic policy

Over the last three decades, EU–Russia (power) relations have fluctuated wildly, defying simple analysis (Forsberg, 2013; Forsberg & Haukkala, 2016; Foxall, 2017, p. 174). The broader evolution and nature of this relation can be roughly divided into three phases (Haukkala, 2015, p. 26): first, a formative phase in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, characterised by optimism and joint efforts; the second phase, more troublesome but still marked by optimism, between 1994 and 2000, influenced by the Russian economic crash of 1998, NATO's engagement in the wars on the Balkan Peninsula and the EU's negative response to Russian actions in the Chechen wars (Nitoiu, 2016). In the third phase, the EU was increasingly seen as a hostile power. Despite a rather optimistic start with several concluded agreements, for example, the renewed ND or the 2006 agreement on the facilitation of the issuance of visas to the citizens of the EU and Russia, no genuine partnership was established, with Russia starting to question Western intentions during the “colour revolutions” in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) (Foxall, 2017, p. 176; Haukkala, 2015, p. 26). Most recently, the relationship has become further complicated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. Accordingly, also the practical (geopolitical) discourse in Russia changed from being quite positive to closer cooperation (around the turn of the millennium) to becoming increasingly hostile and anti-Western (Foxall, 2017, p. 179). However, despite the current tensions, and the

economic sanctions emplaced after 2014, Russia has remained the largest supplier of natural gas and petroleum oil to the EU, ahead of Norway (Eurostat, 2018).

For Russia (and previously the Soviet Union), the Arctic is a decisive factor in “both Russian national identity and conceptions of security and sovereignty” (Wilson Rowe, 2009, p. 2) – the North is considered as the “significant economic, geo-political, and strategic engine of Russia” (Laine, 2011, p. 167). This domestic component essentially involves Russia's Arctic exploratory heritage and the related intention of constructing a specific Northern identity based on the “conquest of the North” (Wilson Rowe & Blakkisrud, 2014). Accordingly, Russia has been pursuing a “geographically clear-cut strategy between the domestic arena, where it refuses to tolerate any kind of foreign interventionism and its commitment to goodwill and cooperation in the international [Arctic] arena” (Knecht & Keil, 2013, p. 181). Thus, the region constitutes a “unique – and uniquely controversial – political and geographic component in Russia's foreign policy” – a combination of committing to developing international (economic) cooperation on the one hand, and investments in militarisation of the Russian North on the other hand, with a strong discourse of protecting its national interests in the Arctic (Baev, 2018, p. 408). And yet, the broader foreign policy discourse in the Arctic over the past decade has been guided by “cooperation first arguments”, despite the Ukrainian unrest of 2014 (Byers, 2017; Staun, 2017). This policy approach shifted noticeably after 2008, with a stronger Arctic narrative on building cooperation than previously (Klimenko, 2016, pp. 3–6). Thus, some argue that the Ukrainian crisis has had scant impact on Moscow's perceptions of the Arctic as a region of international cooperation and peace (Konyshev, Sergunin, & Subbotin, 2017, p. 120). On the other hand, the Ukraine crisis has undoubtedly drawn attention to the military security dimension in the Arctic. Not only have NATO and Russia conducted larger military exercises in the region, joint military exercises between NATO countries and Russia have been cancelled or postponed indefinitely due to the 2014 crisis (Østhagen, Sharp, & Hilde, 2018, p. 166).

Basically, two documents, both approved before the Ukrainian crisis, define Russia's strategy in the Arctic. The first document, “Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic to 2020 and Beyond”, was adopted on 18 September 2008, followed by an update in 2013, titled “Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security”. Explicitly clarifying the fundamental importance of the region for Russia and broadly reflecting the country's two main Arctic interests – economic development and (military) security – these strategic documents highlight four key priorities: climate-change mitigation, resource exploration and exploitation, sustainable development and the Arctic as a region of peace and international cooperation (Konyshev et al., 2017, p. 106). They further consider the A5 as the main stakeholders in Arctic cooperation and accordingly aim to limit the influence of Arctic “outsiders” (Baev, 2018, pp. 410–411). This being the case, Russia does not envisage much of a role for the EU in the building of the future international regime(s) for the Arctic. Moreover, the Union is predominantly seen as having a regulatory character that seeks to impose stringent standards that undermines Russia's economic ambitions in the Arctic (Depledge & Tulupov, 2016). As such, the EU (or any of its non-Arctic Member States) is hardly mentioned in the two Arctic doctrines. In Russia's Arctic Strategy of 2008, the EU is only mentioned once, in relation to “the inter-parliamentary interaction within the framework of the

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| Player | Discusses the EU's Arctic policy and critically assesses EU engagement in the Arctic region |
| Seeker | Tells the story of the EU application for AC observer status, with rather sceptical arguments concerning Russian approval |
| Prohibitor | Refers to the EP's call for banning oil drilling in Arctic waters and depicts the EU as an initiator of restrictive regulations |
| Partner | Highlights the partner relations of the EU and Russia in the Arctic and describes the EU as a trustworthy Arctic stakeholder |

Fig. 2. Core narratives of EU–Arctic engagement.
Source: Own compilation

Russia–European Union partnership”. Most likely, this refers to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the EU and Russia, which entered into force in 1997, initially for 10 years and reviewed annually ever since 2007. The PCA established a political framework for regular consultation and sectoral agreements, although some dialogues are currently suspended. Similarly, the EU is also mentioned in the 2014 state programme on the “Socio-Economic Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020”, which has the same references to the EU and the BEAC as the 2008 document (The Russian Government, 2014). However, the later version of the state programme from 2017 contains no references to the EU. Additionally, the strategy also refers to the BEAC as specific venue to strengthen the relations between Russia and the other Arctic states (The Russian Government, 2008). In the strategy's 2013 update, the EU has not found its terminological way into the paper. Although the doctrine stresses the importance and development of international cooperation in the Arctic, it only refers to cooperation efforts with the other Arctic states. Similarly, also Russian policymakers have rather been silent on the EU's Arctic engagement. Only in December 2017, the Russian Ambassador-at-Large for the Arctic, Vladimir V. Barbin (TASS, 2017) stated that “approving of the EU's official status in the Arctic Council is not in the agenda. (...) Considering sanctions against Russia, we believe that approving the EU's status would be premature. Otherwise, the observer status of the EU would duplicate its representation in the Arctic Council” (own translation).

An “Arctic European Union” as seen from Russia

Over the last two decades, the EU's role in Russia's geopolitical discourse has changed considerably, from “one where cooperation with the EU was seen as desirable to one where confrontation with the EU seemed unavoidable” (Foxall, 2017, p. 186). According to Haukkala (2015, p. 37), fluctuations in EU–Russia relations “have followed and perhaps even simply reflected the general pattern of relations between Russia and the West” and greater Russian willingness to (re-)find a place in a rather unipolar EU-centric Europe. Therefore, we ask: how has the EU's emerging Arcticness been perceived and narrated in Russia?

Our analysis identified four core narratives regarding the EU's engagement in the Arctic: the EU as *player*, the EU as *seeker*, the EU as *prohibitor* and the EU as *partner* (see Fig. 2). These four narratives demonstrate different attitudes to the EU's Arctic engagement depending on the time and topics of publications in the Russian media.

The *player* refers to the EU's Arctic policy-making steps and recurs in articles published between 2008 and 2018. Basically, the narrative describes the EU's various Arctic policy documents and its motivation of being politically involved in Arctic affairs, depicting the EU's Arctic place among the relevant regional stakeholders. It points out that the EU is interested in developing the Arctic due to industrialisation prospects and the possibility of more business opportunities. The narrative sees environmental protection and sustainable development, as well as the economic development of the region, as key motivations for involvement in Arctic affairs. Accordingly, climate change stimulates economic activity, which could lead to the opening of new transport routes and access to natural resources. Thus, the EU is depicted as attracted by the natural resources of the region and concerned over its own energy security.

The EU's goals of preserving the unique natural environment are associated not only with the scale and methods of work in the Arctic, but also with the improvement of energy efficiency and the development of renewable energy in countries of densely populated industrialized Europe. (Utkin, 2012) (All the following quotations from articles are our own translation, see Annex 2.)

Generally, EU Arctic policy is characterised as being too broad, only weakly coordinated between the Union's main institutions and lacking legal competences. And yet, the narrative admits that the EU plays its “classic role” of normative power in the region, developing and offering standards for preserving the environment and sustainable development, as well as protecting the rights of indigenous peoples. Moreover, the narrative positions the EU as an actor who needs support from other Arctic actors in order to be more prevalent in the region. The narrative suggests that the EU could strengthen its regional position via political consolidations. This relates in particular to a stronger political influence over Greenland and increasing cooperation with Norway and Russia.

In order to enhance its power in the Arctic, Europe ideally needs to gain more influence over Greenland, which belongs to Denmark, but has quite a wide autonomy and a common border with Canada. (Gulevich, 2011)

The EU's Arctic policy inevitably involves negotiations with Russia and Norway. (...) This approach expands the field of mutually acceptable package solutions, where the concession in one of the areas may lead to gain in another. (Utkin, 2012)

However, the latter is specifically portrayed as challenging. It is highlighted that the active presence of the EU in the Arctic could not only create new opportunities for collaboration with Russia but potentially also complicate existing bilateral relations. In particular, this argument concerns different readings of Arctic economic development as well as the increasing geopolitical importance of

the region. It has been criticised that although the various policy documents highlight the EU's interest in cooperating with all Arctic states, they do not pay enough attention to Russia as a key strategic partner in the region.

Thus, it becomes obvious: the EU is ready to join the "ice race" like other states that show interest in the region. However, in the Northern Strategy of the European Union there are still a lot of "blind spots". In particular, the role of the Russian Federation is still "not designated", even though today about 70% of the Arctic is Russian territory, and its indigenous population is twice as large as in other the circumpolar states. (Dementieva, 2018)

It also noted that the EU's restrictive measures against Russia in response to the crisis in Ukraine have a spillover effect on economic developments in the Arctic. Additionally, the EU's Arctic engagement, including its research component, is seen as competing with pre-existing cooperative formats and programmes. In general, however, the narrative portrays the EU not only as an active Arctic *player*: as a regional partner, but also as a competitor to Russia. The EU is expected to intensify its involvement in the region through diplomatic and economic means.

Thus, the EU is a new player in the Arctic. Therefore, it is not so much about what the EU wants, but how the Union is perceived as an Arctic player by other states, which generally do not consider it as a strong participant. (Eremina, 2016)

This statement supports the proposition that since the EU is a rather new regional stakeholder, other actors have a hard time understanding the EU's role in the Arctic (Koivuova et al., 2012, p. 361). The narrative denotes that Russian media has been following this popular understanding and picturing the EU as a new and complicated actor in the region.

The next narrative – the *seeker* – appeared between 2013 and 2015, when the EU was actively pursuing observer status on the AC. Despite the EU's multidimensional presence otherwise, it is more the symbolic status of being an AC observer that is publicly perceived as enhancing European credibility and legitimacy as an Arctic actor (Raspotnik, 2018, p. 123). Thus, the seeker narrative broadly refers to the EU's interests in the Arctic, as well as then ongoing talks with Iceland over EU membership. It further connects the EU's AC aspirations and Icelandic EU membership as two interlinked events, which could help the Union to become a more legitimate regional actor. However, assessments of the potential of Iceland lobbying for observer status for the EU were rather sceptical.

Assessing the political influence of Iceland in the Arctic, it is clearly not enough to meet the ambitions of the European Union. This is supported by the fact that in May 2013 the EU (the only one of the seven applicants) did not receive permanent observer status in the Arctic Council due to continuing disagreements with Canada over the import of seal meat [seal products]. (Tulupov, 2014)

This narrative also links with Russian reluctance to allow the EU access to the Arctic governance table. Basically, the reasons here are twofold. Firstly, the apprehension that EU observer status would mean over-representation of European participation in the AC, as Denmark, Finland and Sweden are already Member States.

Denmark, Sweden and Finland are actively in favour of permanent observer status for the EU, while Moscow is strongly against. Its main argument is that these three countries are EU members, and if Brussels is admitted to the AC, it will result in a duplication of EU membership and influence. (Chernenko, 2013)

Secondly, the EU's request for new and updated legislation in order to facilitate dispute settlement in the region goes against

Russia's argument that the existing international legal framework is sufficient. Further, the narrative interprets the EU's attempt to gain observer status as a political challenge to Russia. In a nutshell, the *seeker* describes the EU as having high ambitions to become an officially recognised observer in the AC, whereas its interests are not in line with those of Russia, due to differing views on energy policy and economic sanctions, which in the end also affect Arctic partnerships.

The third narrative, the EU as *prohibitor*, was triggered by the EP's Resolution of March 2017, on an Integrated European Policy for the Arctic (see Fig. 1). Essentially, the prohibitor narrative sees the resolution as a call for banning oil drilling in Arctic waters. It depicts the EU as the initiator of restrictive regulations that could threaten Arctic (economic) development. The proposed ban is described as aimed at limiting Russian economic activity in the Arctic: an attempt on the part of the EU to gain greater power and become more influential in the Arctic.

Experts see this [proposal to ban Arctic drilling] as an attempt of the European parliamentarians to confirm their status in the development of the Arctic region, where most shelf resources belong to Russia. By adopting the resolution, MEPs supported the initiative of former US President Barack Obama, who put considerable effort into developing bans on oil production in some regions of the Arctic. (Akhmadiev, 2017)

The EP's call was not the first legislative attempt of the EU to demonstrate Arctic actorness that was negatively perceived within the Arctic. In 2009, the EU adopted Regulation No 1007/2009 on trade in seal products. Even though some Arctic states, particularly Canada, were not enthusiastic about this regulation, our research has not identified any relevant articles on this topic in the Russian media. The reason might be the development of a similar policy by the Russian government, resulting in a regulation, also issued in 2009, that banned the hunting of all harp seals of less than one year of age (International Fund for Animal Welfare, 2009). Two years later, the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation banned the import and export of harp seal skins (Fink, 2011).

Finally, the narrative of the EU as *partner* highlights the partnership relations between Russia and the EU in the Arctic. It was found only in articles published in 2018 – presumably spurred by the visit of the EU Ambassador at Large for the Arctic, Marie-Anne Coninx, to Russia on 14–19 February 2018 (European External Action Service, 2018), as well as the approval of new funding for cross-border programmes.

The visit of the EU's Arctic Ambassador received fairly positive coverage in Russian media. It was hailed as demonstrating the EU's collaborative interest in addressing environmental challenges in the region as well as in developing the Northern Sea Route.

The European Union is interested in further cooperation in the field of environment and looks forward to the prospects for the development of the Northern Sea Route. The main obstacle to such cooperation, as observed by both parties, is sanctions. (Pedanov, 2018)

Cross-border programmes such as Kolarctic CBC, South-East Finland–Russia CBC and Karelia CBC, jointly financed by the EU and Russia and operating in regions of Finland, Northwest Russia and Sweden, were also noted. These programmes are represented as a common effort to improve living conditions in the North.

The projects with funding from Russia and Europe will build new roads and equip checkpoints, create weather-resistant transport and communication systems, introduce technological innovations, and improve the health care and education systems in the border areas. Attention will also be paid to the

development of tourism, scientific work and adaptation to climate change. (Tretyakova, 2018)

This narrative describes the EU as a trustworthy *Arctic partner* – while noting the issue of sanctions as complicating collaboration on both sides. However, with its focus on the EU's Arctic interests and common ongoing projects, the narrative draws a very positive picture of the (European) Arctic as a territory of partnership and collaboration, despite the economic sanctions.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the EU and its various institutional actors have slowly but steadily developed a dedicated Arctic policy, setting common positions, stressing the EU's Arctic credentials and prominently expressing its very own "Arcticness". While academia has scrutinised the EU's Arctic endeavour at length, very little attention has been directed to policy "reception" and how the EU's Arctic positions, practices and reasoning have been received by intended and unintended Arctic actors, including Russia. Research on the EU's Arctic policy steps has essentially set aside the perspectives of the Arctic states on the EU's northwards push.

That is why our study has focused on Russian public perceptions on the EU's Arctic role. However, this is merely a first step, as hardly anything is known about related thoughts from Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Norway or the USA. Moreover, the Russian perspective lacks insights on the thoughts and perceptions of enhanced EU Arctic engagement by Russian policymakers and practitioners. Our study revealed that the EU's engagement in the Arctic region has not (yet) been an important topic in Russian media. Between 2008 and 2018, only a limited number of articles reflected on the EU's Arctic policy and its involvement in the region. In general, Russian media illustrates the Arctic as an area of pragmatic relations between the EU and Russia rather than being a region of conflict and political rivalry. This supports previous findings of Russia being open to cooperate with foreign partners in the Arctic and pursuing a non-assertive foreign policy in that regard (Sergunin & Konyshov, 2014; Staun, 2017). The results of our scrutiny of how Russian media articles between 2008 and 2018 have represented the EU's Arctic engagement can be summarised in four core narratives: the EU as *player*, *seeker*, *prohibitor* and *partner* (see Fig. 2). The *player* narrative has appeared constantly in our sample, ever since 2008. The *seeker* narrative demonstrates that the controversial topic of AC observer status has been essentially influenced by the broader context, reflecting reactions to the EU's application for observer status on the AC, the ensuing resistance on the background of EU–Iceland negotiations, the Ukrainian crisis and related sanctions against Russia. The *prohibitor* narrative provides the strongest evidence of the key role of Russia's Arctic (and its continental shelf) as a (future) resource base for Russia, with any limitations emplaced on oil and gas exploitation having the potential to further create disputes between Russia and the EU. Of the four narratives, the most recent *partner* narrative displays the most positive attitude towards EU Arctic engagement. It is noteworthy that this narrative appeared in 2018, four years after the imposition of economic sanctions. Although sanctions are perceived as hindrance in broader EU–Russia Arctic relations, for example, with regard to the EU's AC observer status, the potential of collaborative efforts maintains. Thus, the narrative provokes an interesting observation in relation to its temporal appearance. Northern cooperation between the EU

and Russia was only narrated as an Arctic cooperation effort *after* the EU and Russia experienced a deterioration of its relationship and despite the fact that functional cooperation between the EU and Russia has already been taking place for decades in northern Europe.

What do these narratives mean with regard to the mutual existence of an "Arctic exception" and the vague representation of EU–Russia linkages in the Arctic context, despite rather close cooperation over the last 20–30 years (Aalto, 2013, p. 105)? In general, Russia favours bilateral relations with EU Member States over an institutional relationship with a *sui generis* international actor located predominantly in Brussels. This has often made the EU being an "inconvenient partner" for Russia (Tulupov & Tsarenko, 2019, p. 86). On the other hand, as our analysis has shown, the EU has been featured as a single (Arctic) actor in Russian media. In comparison to most of its Arctic neighbours, Russia has been rather reserved concerning any enhanced "globalisation" of Arctic cooperation and diplomacy, preferring a conservative approach to Arctic institutions and seeking to preserve established institutions like the AC unchanged (Aalto, 2013, p. 117). These concerns seem to be anchored in broader internal debates on how regional cooperation could best serve Russia's long-term Arctic priorities – the balancing act between an "open" Arctic of international, market-driven considerations and a "closed" region of securitising Arctic space and nationalising its resources (Wilson Rowe, 2018, p. 50 and 87). With regard to the EU, these sovereignty concerns are particularly related to Russia's experiences of the EU in northern Europe, to broader EU–Russia relations – including sanctions – and the wider area of the EU–Russia neighbourhood in general (Aalto, 2013, p. 117).

Thus, our analysis shows that the EU's aspirations of becoming an active Arctic actor have been challenged by the current lack of recognition by as well as the limited cooperation with Russia in the Arctic region. That being said, it may be possible to find a balance, based on Russia's stance to an "open" Arctic for international collaboration, in line with its security interests and the EU's competences of norm promotion through commercial activities. The current situation offers possibilities for the EU to become more engaged in the Arctic by facilitating economic diplomacy with Russia over developing the region. Economic diplomacy adds to regulatory convergence and political dialogue, while it also contributes to reaching a common understanding with third countries. Business partnerships with Russia in the Arctic could bring the EU certain recognition, also enriching the political agenda. Moreover, the EU is known for its expertise in economic growth based on the development of environmentally sustainable technology. Such expertise may prove highly valuable, especially for the development of the Arctic, and could serve to motivate further EU Arctic engagement. However, the current economic sanction regime is an impediment here. Enhanced EU–Russia partnership in the Arctic seems likely to emerge only after the main constraints will be solved at the political level. In the meantime, Russia could use this factor to its advantage and rely more on investing into its own technologies applicable for Arctic development – and the EU could reconsider its sanctions concerning Arctic projects.

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Annex 1: List of Russian media platforms

1. Центр стратегических оценок и прогнозов/Centre of Strategic Estimations and Forecasts: an independent Russian non-commercial organisation focused on issues in foreign and security policies. <http://csf.ru/>
2. Деловые Новости [Delovye Novosti]: an informational–analytical agency that publishes materials about Russian and foreign politics, economy and business. <http://delonovosti.ru>

3. ЕвразияЭксперт [EvraziyaEkspert]: an informational–analytical portal on the Eurasian region. <http://eurasia.expert>
4. ИнфоРос [InfoRos]: a Russian information agency covering a wide range of issues, including politics, economy, social and cultural affairs in Russia and abroad. <http://inforos.ru>
5. Международная Жизнь/International Affairs: a journal covering issues of international politics, diplomacy and global security. It was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. <https://interaffairs.ru>
6. Коммерсантъ [Kommersant]: a private, independent daily newspaper focused on socio-political issues. <https://www.kommersant.ru>
7. LIFE: a Russian online medium covering a wide range of topics. <https://life.ru>
8. Ореанда-Новости [Oreanda-Novosti]: an independent news agency dealing with various topics in Russia. <https://www.oreanda.ru>
9. Парламентская газета [Parlamentskaya gazeta]: a socio-political newspaper published by the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. <https://www.pnp.ru/>
10. REGNUM: federal news agency that covers events and issues in Russia and the post-Soviet countries. <https://regnum.ru>
11. Росбалт [Rosbalt]: a Russian federal information and analytical agency that covers various topics in Russia and abroad. <http://www.rosbalt.ru>
12. Российская Газета [Rossiyskaya Gazeta]: a daily newspaper issued by the Government of Russia. It provides the official versions of government documents. <https://rg.ru>
13. Российский совет по международным делам/Russian International Affairs Council: a non-profit academic and diplomatic think tank with the mission to facilitate Russia's peaceful integration into the global community. The Council provides a platform for collaboration between scholars, business, civil society and the state. <http://russiancouncil.ru>
14. Свободная пресса [Svobodnaya Pressa]: a Russian online medium focused on political, social, economic and cultural issues. <http://svpressa.ru/>
15. Вся Европа.ru [Vsya Evropa.ru]: an online magazine about relations between the European Union and Russia. <http://alleuropa.ru/>
2. Germanovich, Ch. (2009, 6 February) Арктические шахматы. Часть 2. *Oreanda-Novosti* – 1073 words
3. Gulevich, V. (2011, 16 August) Арктический вопрос во внешней политике ЕС. *International Affairs* – 1026 words
4. Utkin, S. (2012, 21 March) ЕС и Арктика: присматриваясь к будущему. *Russian International Affairs Council* – 1184 words
5. Chernenko, E. (2013, 14 May) Россия ограничивает полярный круг. *Gazeta Kommersant* – 749 words
6. Preobrazhenskiy, I. (2013, 16 May) Полюс противоречий. *Rosbalt* – 597 words
7. Semushin, D. (2013, 18 May) Евросоюз рвется к арктическому сырью: заседание Арктического совета Кируне. *REGNUM* – 1428 words
8. Tulupov, D. (2014, 6 February) «Остров свободы» в Арктике. *Russian International Affairs Council* – 1789 words
9. Goryashko, S; Chernenko, E. (2015, 23 April) За полярным кругом становится холоднее. *Gazeta Kommersant* – 628 words
10. Naumova, E. (2015, 29 October) Арктика: интересы нециркумполярных держав в регионе. *Delovye Novosti* – 1014 words
11. Dmitrieva, E. (2016, 27 April) Через европейские санкции пройдут российские ледоколы. *Gazeta Kommersant* – 441 words
12. Sukhomlin, K. (2016, 29 October) Взаимоотношения между государствами в пределах арктической зоны в современной геополитике. *Centre of Strategic Estimations and Forecasts* – 3899 words
13. Eremina, N. (2016, 22 December) Евросоюз включается в «большую игру» в Арктике. *EvraziyaEkspert* – 1824 words
14. Akhmediyev, E. (2017, 20 March 20) Европарламент призвал запретить нефтедобычу в Арктике. *LIFE* – 868 words
15. Fomchenkov, T. (2017, March 21) Лед без пятен. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* – 375 words
16. Aksenov, S. (2017, March 25) Арктика мир накануне войны. *Svobodnaya Pressa* – 523 words 1179
17. Samoyleva, V. (2017, June 09) Битва за Арктику: ЕС рвётся на север. *REGNUM* – 1342 words
18. Pedanov, E. (2018, February 02) Арктика – место сотрудничества. *International Affairs* – 523 words
19. Tret'yakova, M. (2018, July 26) Россия и Евросоюз совместно улучшат жизнь приграничных северных регионов. *Parlamentskaya gazeta* – 569 words
20. Dementieva, A. (2018, September 26) Евросоюз активизирует свою политику в Арктике. *InfoRos* – 610 words

Annex 2: Media articles selected for this study

1. Goryukhin, A. 2008 Арктический вектор Европейского Союза. *Vsya Evropa.ru*, 11(27) – 515 words