

5. The Future of the Arctic Council

09:00 - 10:30 Tuesday, 31st January, 2023

Location The Edge: Arbeidskontoret 1

Type Side Event: In-Person Only

Chairs Fridtjof Nansen Institute Norway

240 The Future of the Arctic Council

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Session Description

The Future of the Arctic Council

The Arctic region is marked by great geographic diversity and considerable change over the past three decades in climatic and geopolitical conditions. The Arctic Council has followed this development. From its inception as a forum for environmental cooperation, it is now considered the main arena for cooperation on a wide range of issues in the Arctic. The most significant work carried out under the auspices of the Council is related to the compilation of knowledge and, on this basis, the formulation of national, regional, and international recommendations.

In the beginning of March, the work of the Arctic Council was put on temporarily hold by the seven western Arctic states because of Russia's war against Ukraine. The pause was introduced by Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Canada and the USA. The pause applies to all official Council meetings as well as its sub-bodies. It applies pending assessments of and, by implication, decisions about how the work potentially may continue, the "Arctic seven" said in a joint statement.

The Council is the key forum for international cooperation in the Arctic and Russia holds the Chair for the 2021-2023 period. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 dealt a severe blow to Arctic cooperation - in that the other Arctic states viewed it as an impossibility to continue Arctic cooperation in light of Russia's breach of international law. The Arctic Council had, of course, been tested before. For example, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov didn't attend the ministerial meeting in Canada in 2015 and one Senior Arctic Official-meeting was cancelled after Russia's annexation of Crimea. Today's situation exceeds past experience Norway is set to assume the Arctic Council chairmanship in 2023, in these complicated and uncertain times for Arctic cooperation.

So, what does this mean and what are the consequences? Efforts to map environmental challenges in the Arctic could experience a setback. The same goes for climate change issues, for example permafrost. This again could lead to gaps in the data that is needed to make well informed decisions on mitigation and adaptation at the national level and in international cooperation. The lack of data and assessments from Arctic Council might impede global action towards climate change and pollution in the Arctic. So, what should and could the Arctic states do? In this side event we have gathered international experts on the Arctic Council discussing the future of the Arctic Council in geopolitically strained times.

Speakers:

- Elana Rowe, Research professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI)
- Evan Bloom, Senior Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington
- Lars-Otto Reiersen, Director of Arctic Knowledge
- Svein Vigeland Rottem, Senior Research Fellow at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute
- Malgorzata Smieszek, Researcher at UiT-The Arctic University of Norway
- Whitney Lackenbauer, Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North & Professor in the School for the Study of Canada at Trent University