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Briefing Note

The 33rd Year of the Calotte Academy: Unstoppable Arctic Discourse

Zhanna Anshukova, Tom Gabriel Royer, and Adam Kočí

A field report from the Calotte Academy in the European Arctic and Sápmi, 11—17 November 2024

The Calotte Academy, an international travelling symposium and school of Arctic dialogue, took place in the European Arctic and Sápmi from the 11th to the 17th of November 2024. This year's Academy brought together seventeen early-career researchers and seven professors from thirteen countries, attending sessions and excursions in Rovaniemi, Luleå, Hetta, Kautokeino, Inari, and Sodankylä. The event was organised by the Northern Policy Society in cooperation with the Sámi Education Institute (SAKK), the International Reindeer Husbandry Centre (EALÁT), the Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University, Launch Pad Finland, and UArctic's Thematic Network on Geopolitics and Security.

The theme of the Academy, “Environmental Security vs. Military Security,” reflects the growing global crises and their impact on the Arctic. First of all, the environmental damage caused by resource overuse and the political inability to address the ecological catastrophe. Secondly, the intensifying great power rivalries, arms races, and conflicts in regions like Ukraine, the Middle East, and Africa. The theme underscored the growing tension between environmental and military priorities in societies, politics, transnational relations, and media.

Participants met informally in Rovaniemi in the evening before the official program began. The “warm-up” meeting took place in the common room of a DAS dormitory, located near the University of Lapland campus. In a friendly atmosphere, accompanied by snacks and drinks, initial connections were made as participants eagerly discussed their expectations for the upcoming week.

The first session, held on Monday, the 11th of November at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, began with opening remarks by Lassi Heininen, who emphasized the resilience of the Calotte Academy amid this year's organizational challenges. The Academy, established in 1991, is

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the oldest event of its kind in the Arctic – preceding even the first meeting of the Arctic Eight countries. Professor Heininen stressed the importance of engaging in meaningful discussions after each presentation, which is central to the unique format of the Academy. He also highlighted that the first session coincided with the opening day of COP29 in Baku, underscoring the environmental focus of this year's theme.

The session's theme, "Securitizing Science and Society – Re-militarizing the Arctic?" addressed one of the topical issues of the Arctic. The first speaker, Professor Matti Nojonen, presented on the topic of "Emerging Securitization Narratives and Academic Freedom," focusing particularly on Chinese studies. Matti emphasized the need for critical voices in the media, noting that the trend of securitization raises important ethical, legal, and practical questions about the limits of academic freedom. The next speaker, Professor Miyase Christensen, introduced the theme of "Arctic geopolitics and the role of (mis)information in a polarised communication ecology". The presentation highlighted the role of media in shaping both global and regional perceptions, especially in the case of security and national interests in the Arctic. The third presentation, "Securitizing the High North: A New Priority for NATO," was given by Marco Dordoni. After that, Professor Laura Junka-Aikio gave a presentation with the title "There's plenty of space, and it doesn't bother the civilians", a quote that reflects the military's attitude to the consequences of militarisation in the Arctic.

After the lunch break, the first session concluded in the afternoon with a presentation by Lassi Heininen on the topic of "The Military in the Arctic - the Arctic for the Military." The professor's slideshow featured maps illustrating conflict dynamics in the Arctic. Lassi pointed out that we have not witnessed any conflict in the Arctic since the Second World War. Still, the Arctic Ocean is probably the world's most significant region for nuclear deterrence, ensured especially by submarines operating in deep waters. Thus, the so-called GIUK gap is crucial as a gateway to the Arctic and a potential meeting point for U.S. and Russian submarines.

After a full day of discussions, participants headed to the Santa Claus Village on the outskirts of Rovaniemi. The first excursion in the Academy program was not only a pleasant experience that put everyone in the Christmas spirit, but also an opportunity to discuss the business prospects in the Lapland region and the impact of mass tourism on residents and the traditional livelihoods of Indigenous Sámi people.

After the Santa Claus Village, the Calotte Academy headed to Sweden. By evening, the group crossed the border and arrived at a campsite near Luleå, where they spent the night in charming, red-painted Swedish houses on the Bothnian Bay coast.

On Tuesday, the 12th of November, starting at Luleå Technical University (LTU), the session focused on "Alternative Approaches to (Arctic) Security". The group was welcomed by Prof. Athanasios Migdala from the Department of Business Administration, Technology and Social Sciences (ETS). The first presentation was by Rea Fraser, who spoke about the role of the military as a landowner, using Punta Vigía as a case study. Next, Zhanna Anshukova presented a unique perspective, exploring how sexuality can be perceived as a security threat. Caterina Monni followed with an analysis of Arctic security, focusing on the balance between hybrid strategies and nuclear challenges. Finally, Lassi Heininen concluded the session with a presentation on environmental security as a necessary priority, proposing it as a replacement for traditional military security approaches.

After lunch at LTU, some participants visited LTU's Science Centre, where they saw, among other exhibits, a Nike Orion rocket and exercised their creativity with Legos. This was followed by a cultural visit to Gammelstad Church Village (UNESCO World Heritage Site). After that, the Calotte Academy travelled to Hetta, Finland to stay at the comfy wooden chalets of Hetan Kota.



(Photo: Zhanna Anshukova)

The next day, Wednesday, the 13th of November, the participants attended the session of “The Arctic Yearbook Presents” at the new building of Čoarvemátta – Sámi National Theatre Beivváš, the Sámi High School, and the Reindeer Herding School, highlighting Indigenous perspectives on Arctic politics and self-governance, food security, extractivist narratives, paradiplomacy, and exclusion. It began with Anders Oskal, who introduced the NOMAD Indigenous Food Lab, an initiative highlighting the importance of traditional food systems in Arctic Indigenous communities. Next, Mirkka Ollila discussed power dynamics in contested extractivist narratives on the Kola Peninsula, offering insights into the tension between development and Indigenous rights. Adam Kočí explored Greenland's paradiplomatic relations in a postcolonial context, examining how self-governance is shaping its external relations. Finally, Eleni Kavvatha analyzed the EU Critical Raw Materials Act. The session highlighted the growing influence of Indigenous voices in Arctic politics, while addressing the challenges they continue to face in asserting their rights and roles.

This was followed by a traditional Sámi lunch: roast reindeer with mashed potatoes and cranberries. After this delicacy, the participants listened to the welcoming joik of the musical artist Inger Marie Nilut. The Academy visited the school's various



(Photo: Zhanna Anshukova)

handicraft study rooms, where students have the opportunity to learn a range of skills, including sewing traditional clothing, knife carving, reindeer slaughtering... and e-sports!

After this, the Calotte Academy visited the International Sámi Film Institute; the group had a lively discussion with film commissioner Liisa Holmberg about the Sámi film industry. The participants had a chance to see iconic Sámi film posters (*Sámi Blood*, *Let The River Flow*, *Pathfinder*, ...) and to take a look inside the studios.

On the 14th of November, the Calotte Academy travelled to Enontekiö for a session which took place at the Town Hall. It focused on the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) and its evolving dynamics under current geopolitical challenges. Professor Urban Wråkberg opened the session with a presentation on research conducted in the Euro-Arctic borderland, addressing how shifting political landscapes are reshaping cross-border cooperation. Next, Gerald Zojer explored the connection between digitalization and environmental security, discussing the tangible impacts of cloud computing on Arctic regions. His presentation highlighted the hidden environmental costs of digital infrastructure and its implications for security in the Arctic.

After the session, the participants travelled to Ivalo. During the trip, Tatiana Petrova held the workshop “Save the Calotte Academy!” giving participants a chance to exchange ideas on “funding for new Arctic adventures with the Calotte Academy”, “broadening horizons: friends of the Calotte Academy and global connections for greater impact”, and “bringing the methodology of the Calotte Academy to your local community (Don’t copy but apply)”.

In Ivalo, the participants visited UTAC’s winter testing facility. The group had a chance to visit indoor testing environments, including test tracks. After the excursion, the Academy participants learned more about the firm’s activities and testing grounds from the presentation. At the end of the day, the Calotte Academy travelled to Inari.

Friday, the 15th of November began with a peaceful walk along the Juutua Trail, ending at the Jäniskoski Rapids. Participants enjoyed the beauty of northern nature and learned how to start a fire outdoors. Some participants spotted lingonberries still growing in the wild in November — a first-time experience for many non-Arctic researchers.

Next, the group visited the Siida Sámi Museum and Nature Center, where they learned more about the rich culture of the Sámi people and northern nature. The museum provided a deeper understanding of life in the Arctic, both past and present.

After lunch, the group gathered at Lassinkota, a modern Sámi-style hut at the Sámi Education Institute. There was a session titled “Two Mediterraneans: the Southern vis-a-vis the Northern One.” The session

explored the Arctic’s maritime and environmental challenges. Céline Rodrigues spoke about the connection between the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, focusing on Portugal’s role in Arctic



(Photo: Janne Seurujärvi)

security. After that, Marco Ghisetti introduced the idea of the “Nordic Mediterranean” as a new way to think about Arctic cooperation. The next presentation was given by Marlene Payva, who discussed how global crises affect the ocean environment and the role of UNCLOS in Arctic governance. The last presenter was Christine Gawinski, who shared insights on how small sea creatures called copepods are adapting to changes in the ice-free Barents Sea. The session ended with lively discussions that brought together ideas from different fields and viewpoints, highlighting the Academy’s focus on meaningful dialogue.

On Saturday, the 16th of November, the day started with a session titled “Arctic Cooperation and Militarization vis-a-vis De-securitization: Russian Perspectives.” Held at Lassinkota, the session



combined in-person and online participants. Yulia Zaika spoke about the role of science diplomacy in disaster response and asked whether peace is still possible in a time of growing political tensions in the Arctic.

After lunch, the next session, “The Arctic Yearbook Presents: Global & Planetary Approaches to the Arctic,” explored big global issues through the lens of the Arctic. The first speaker was Tom Royer, who discussed balancing environmental and military security, focusing on commercial spaceports in Northern Europe. Next, Raymond

Ruhaak talked about how humans’ disconnection from nature fuels unsustainable resource use. The final presentation was given by Michaela Louise Coote, who looked at how environmental protection and development can go hand-in-hand in Arctic cooperation. The session ended with the mini-launch of the Arctic Yearbook 2024, celebrating this publication’s role in advancing Arctic research and discussions.

On the final day, Sunday, the 17th of November, the Calotte Academy travelled from Inari to Sodankylä. At the Sodankylä Town Hall, the group met with Stéphanie Lefrère, a sustainability expert. She explained the efforts to tackle environmental challenges, including waste recycling, managing the effects of mining and climate change, and the ambitious Sodankylä Climate Roadmap 2035, which aims to create a greener future. This visit offered a great example of how Arctic communities are addressing global issues with local solutions, showing leadership in sustainability.

The journey ended with a drive back to Rovaniemi. By the time participants arrived at the airport, the train station and the city centre, they reflected on the experiences and ideas shared over the past few days. It was a fitting end to a meaningful exploration of the Arctic’s landscapes, cultures, and challenges.

The 2024 Calotte Academy was, as always, a remarkable journey through the European Arctic and Sápmi, fostering dialogue, collaboration, and learning among early-career researchers. Participants explored diverse themes under “Environmental Security vs. Military Security”. From insightful

sessions on geopolitics, Indigenous governance, and environmental challenges, to excursions that immersed participants in Sámi culture, sustainability initiatives, and Arctic innovation, the Academy provided a meaningful mix of academic discussions and hands-on experiences. The Academy underscored the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and local engagement in tackling the Arctic's pressing issues, leaving participants inspired to apply these lessons within their own research and communities.