



Summary of the fifth high-level
EU Diplomacy Lecture

EU International Relations and
Diplomacy Studies

College of Europe, Bruges

23 October 2018

ANNUAL HIGH-LEVEL
EU DIPLOMACY LECTURE



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EU INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND DIPLOMACY STUDIES

The EU's Arctic Diplomacy: Key Challenges and Strategic Response

H.E. Marie-Anne CONINSX, EU Ambassador at Large for the Arctic



The Rector of the College of Europe, Professor Jörg MONAR, welcomed the audience and underlined the growing importance of the Arctic in light of current environmental changes and geopolitical challenges. The attention given to this region by major global players is turning the Arctic into a topical issue.

Professor Sieglinde GSTÖHL, Director of the Department of EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, introduced the high-level speaker of the fifth annual "EU Diplomacy Lecture", H.E. Ambassador Marie-Anne CONINSX, Ambassador at Large for the Arctic, European External Action Service.

Ambassador CONINSX's lecture focused on the key challenges of the Arctic and the strategic response of the European Union (EU) to these challenges. The transformation that the Arctic is undergoing, brings with it manifold environmental,



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geo-economic and geopolitical challenges that concern not only the Member countries of the Arctic Council (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Russia, the United States, and Canada) but encourage also non-Arctic countries to formulate Arctic strategies. One of the outside countries that is actively promoting its interests in the region, is the People's Republic of China, which in its 2018 White Paper self-identifies as a 'near-Arctic State'.



Among the major environmental challenges for the Arctic is the fact that it is warming up twice as fast as the rest of the planet. There is scientific consensus on the multiple dangers that this phenomenon entails beyond the region itself, and which therefore cannot be ignored. The melting of the Arctic sea ice is responsible for 25% of global warming and the melting of

land ice is directly translated into the rise of sea level. At the same time, the thawing of the permafrost is releasing methane, carbon dioxide and other gases stored therein, and deteriorating and putting at risk of collapse infrastructure built on permafrost-covered areas. Additionally, changes in the Arctic are behind the disruption of the jet stream that is partly to blame for many of the recent extreme weather phenomena.

In parallel, Arctic climatic processes are opening up attractive new business opportunities in the region, especially in the fields of resource extraction (such as oil, gas, metals and fish), shipping and connectivity, fields in which the EU and its members have a strong interest. Bearing in mind that what happens in the Arctic does not stay there, Arctic and non-Arctic players have beefed up their political efforts and cooperation has been reinforced in what is currently one of the most peaceful regions in the world.





In this context, the EU adopted in 2016 its Arctic policy that underlines that the EU has a strategic interest in playing a key role in the Arctic. The EU Arctic Policy is structured around three priorities: the need to address climate change and protect the fragile Arctic environment, promote sustainable development and enhance international cooperation. The EU efforts also build on its 2016 Global Strategy which stresses that it is now more important than ever to ensure that the Arctic remains a zone of low tension, of peace, prosperity and constructive international cooperation. The EU is an Arctic player by virtue of its three Arctic Member States (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) – ‘and by association Norway and Iceland’ through the European Economic Area - and through its expertise in fields relevant to the region such as fisheries and research.

Although the risk of conflict in the Arctic is low at the moment and cooperation in fields such as environmental policy continues between the EU and Russia, the opening up of economic opportunities may reduce the level of security and generate a spillover effect of outside tensions on the region, thus jeopardising the collaborative and peaceful ‘Arctic spirit’.



The Arctic, to conclude, is at the heart of geopolitics, strategic economic interests and climate change, challenges that the EU wants to help address.



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The lecture was followed by a stimulating question and answer session with the audience on topics ranging from the participation of indigenous peoples in Arctic politics to the exploitation of natural resources or the role of the EU in the Arctic Council. In her concluding words, Professor GSTÖHL thanked the speaker for offering a first-hand practitioner's perspective on the EU's Arctic diplomacy and invited the audience to a reception.

Marie-Anne CONINSX is since September 2017 the European Union's first Ambassador at Large for the Arctic. She previously was the EU Ambassador to Canada (2013-2017), after serving four years as the EU Ambassador to Mexico (2009-2013). In Canada, she extensively visited the Canadian Arctic. Her other postings abroad include having served as the number two at the EU Delegations in New York and in Geneva, which provided her with an extensive experience on multilateral issues. Ambassador CONINSX has been an official of the European Union since 1984. She started her career in the European Commission at the Legal Service, and worked during 12 consecutive years as a staff member at Cabinets of three Commissioners, dealing respectively with: External Relations and Trade, Internal Market, Development Policy, and relations with the European Parliament. She also worked at the External Relations Department at EU headquarters, overseeing relations between the EU and Latin America. Ambassador CONINSX studied law at Gent University and carried out post-graduate studies at Cambridge University and at the European University Centre in Nancy.



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