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Disrupting ‘Arctic Exceptionalism’?

A Qualitative Discourse Analysis of the Securitization of Climate Change in the
EU’s Arctic Policy

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Abstract

The Arctic is often depicted as exceptional due to the peaceful cooperation between Arctic states on environmental and societal issues, a concept referred to as Arctic exceptionalism. This understanding of the Arctic is increasingly challenged by competing depiction of exceptionalism in relation to the Arctic. One such example is the EU's Arctic policy, which, revised in 2021, centers around the threat of climate change. This thesis aims to identify how the construction of the Arctic as exceptional in the EU's climate change discourse contrasts with the concept of Arctic exceptionalism and affects established routines therein. Conducting a Foucauldian genealogical discourse analysis, five discursive strategies are identified: first, the depiction of the Arctic as vulnerable; second, the establishment of EU authority in climate change mitigation; third, the construction of global responsibility; fourth, the exceptionalisation of the Arctic by reference to the faster effects of climate change in the Arctic, by depicting it as an example in the global climate change discourse, as well as by point out the global reinforcing effects of climate developments in the Arctic, and last, the removal of inconsistencies in the presentation of the threat.

The exceptionalisation of the Arctic within the climate change discourse in the EU's Arctic policy is analyzed as a securitizing move, finding that it is aimed at a global audience in order to advance the securitization of climate change on a global level. These findings indicate that this deviates from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism, which has its foundations in desecuritization efforts after the Cold War. In contrast to the compartmentalization of Arctic politics and the silencing of security matters, the EU's security move pulls the Arctic onto a global level as a means to securitize climate change globally. Applying ontological security theory, the deviation from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is discussed. The compartmentalization of Arctic politics and the silencing of security matters form routines in Arctic relations that provide stability and predictability. It is shown that EU's climate change discourse with its pull of the Arctic into the global increases insecurity through the violation of these established routines, but visible impacts remain contingent on the acceptance of the securitizing move by Arctic states.

Keywords: Arctic Exceptionalism, Securitization, Climate Change, European Union, Arctic Policy

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Abstract | II |
| Table of Contents..... | III |
| List of Figures | V |
| List of Tables..... | VI |
| List of Abbreviations..... | VII |
| 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Thesis Structure | 2 |
| 1.2 Key Terms | 3 |
| 1.3 Acknowledgement of Recent Geopolitical Developments..... | 3 |
| 2 Methodology | 5 |
| 2.1 Research Topic and Goals | 5 |
| 2.2 Theoretical Considerations | 6 |
| 2.2.1 Choice of Theory..... | 6 |
| 2.2.2 Use of Theory | 8 |
| 2.3 Research Design | 9 |
| 2.3.1 Case Study Research | 9 |
| 2.3.2 Case Selection | 10 |
| 2.4 Methodical Considerations | 11 |
| 2.4.1 Foucauldian Genealogical Discourse Analysis..... | 11 |
| 2.4.2 Data Collection..... | 13 |
| 2.5 Limitations..... | 15 |
| 3 Theories..... | 17 |
| 3.1 Securitization Theory | 17 |
| 3.1.1 Securitization..... | 17 |
| 3.1.2 Macrosecuritization | 19 |
| 3.1.3 Desecuritization..... | 20 |
| 3.2 Ontological Security Theory | 20 |
| 3.2.1 The Roots of Ontological Security | 21 |
| 3.2.2 The Transfer of Ontological Security to International Relations..... | 22 |
| 3.2.3 An Integrated Relational Ontological Security Framework | 24 |

| | | |
|----------|--|-----------|
| 3.3 | Synergies of the Theoretical Frameworks | 26 |
| 4 | Climate Change Discourse and Arctic Exceptionalism | 27 |
| 4.1 | Contextual Positioning of the Analysis | 28 |
| 4.1.1 | The Development of Climate Change as a Security Threat..... | 28 |
| 4.1.2 | The European Union’s Arctic Policy..... | 30 |
| 4.1.3 | The Dual Character of Climate Change in the Arctic..... | 31 |
| 4.2 | The Concept of Arctic Exceptionalism | 32 |
| 4.2.1 | Conceptualizing Arctic Exceptionalism | 33 |
| 4.2.2 | The Desecuritization of Inter-State Relations in the Arctic..... | 35 |
| 4.2.3 | Arctic Exceptionalism and the Routinization of Relations..... | 36 |
| 4.2.4 | Summary | 37 |
| 4.3 | Climate Change Discourse in the EU’s Arctic Policy | 38 |
| 4.3.1 | Discursive Strategies in the EU’s Arctic Policy | 38 |
| 4.3.1.1 | <i>Discursive Strategy 1: Framing the Arctic as Vulnerable</i> | 39 |
| 4.3.1.2 | <i>Discursive Strategy 2: Establishing EU Authority</i> | 41 |
| 4.3.1.3 | <i>Discursive Strategy 3: Constructing International Responsibility for the Arctic</i> | 42 |
| 4.3.1.4 | <i>Discursive Strategy 4: Exceptionalising the Arctic</i> | 44 |
| 4.3.1.5 | <i>Discursive Strategy 5: Removing Inconsistency About Hydrocarbons</i> | 45 |
| 4.3.2 | Climate Change Discourse as a Securitizing Move..... | 47 |
| 4.3.2.1 | <i>Components of Securitization</i> | 47 |
| 4.3.2.2 | <i>Analytical Levels of Macrosecuritization</i> | 49 |
| 4.3.3 | Summary | 50 |
| 4.4 | Impact of the EU’s Climate Change Discourse..... | 50 |
| 4.4.1 | Deviations in the Depiction of the Arctic as Exceptional..... | 51 |
| 4.4.2 | An Ontological Security Perspective on the EU’s Climate Change Impact | 52 |
| 4.4.3 | Summary | 54 |
| 5 | Discussion..... | 55 |
| 6 | Conclusion..... | 58 |
| | Bibliography..... | 61 |
| | Data References | 72 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Conducting a Foucauldian genealogical discourse analysis | 13 |
| Figure 2: Mechanism of Securitization | 18 |
| Figure 3: Core mechanisms of Ontological Security | 22 |
| Figure 4: An integrated relational framework of Ontological Security..... | 25 |
| Figure 5: Elements of Arctic Exceptionalism..... | 35 |
| Figure 6: Discursive Strategies in the EU's Climate Change Discourse..... | 39 |
| Figure 7: Integration of the EU's Climate Change Discourse and Arctic Exceptionalism into the Ontological Security Framework..... | 53 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Alternative Theories Under Consideration..... | 8 |
| Table 2: Academic Publications for Conceptualizing Arctic Exceptionalism | 14 |
| Table 3: Distribution of Collected Data | 15 |

List of Abbreviations

AEPS Arctic Environment Protection Strategy

EU European Union

US Unites States of America

1 Introduction

“[T]he designation of spaces as exceptional, or not, enables particular kinds of interventions. Therefore, it is not climate change and Arctic exceptionalism that produce geopolitical interventions, it is the identification of climate change as a security issue, and the subsequent identification of the Arctic as a space of exception, that enable geopolitical intervention as the region is re-staged as a ‘state of emergency’.” (Dittmer, Moisiso, Ingram & Dodds 2011:203)

In October 2021, the European Commission released a revised version of the European Union’s (EU) Arctic policy, a revision that took place after the extensive European Green Deal put climate change mitigation at the heart of the European Commission’s priorities for the period between 2019 and 2024 (European Commission 2019a). This priority was transferred to the EU’s Arctic policy, where climate change is now framed as the core issue for the Arctic (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:1). In addition to centering around climate change, the 2021 policy also focuses on security to a larger extent than its predecessors, containing a chapter on the Arctic as “a region of peaceful cooperation in the new geopolitical setting” (ibid:2).

This both echoes and contrasts a concept that is in use to describe inter-state relations in the Arctic, Arctic exceptionalism. Influenced by the continuation of cooperative, peaceful relations between Arctic states concerning Arctic matters in comparison to other geographical areas, the idea of the Arctic being exceptional has arisen in academics. Accordingly, common interests have led to the establishment of cooperative structures in intra-Arctic relations (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:57; Heininen, Exner-Pirot & Barnes 2019:5). Arctic states have deliberately created stability and predictability through desecuritization after the Cold War by focusing on shared challenges and opportunities, especially when it comes to environmental, marine, and societal chances and risks (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:57) while simultaneously avoiding potentially conflictual security matters (Young 2012:167). Separating relations from geopolitical developments (Exner-Pirot 2020a:102) has created an arrangement within which Arctic states continue day-to-day operations.

Yet this idea of a detachment of Arctic politics is increasingly challenged. The EU is not the only actor that is increasingly interested in the Arctic, as it is gaining attention from global actors who wish to be involved due to economic interest in Arctic resources or shipping routes as well as due to environmental concerns (Bartenstein 2015:5; Nord 2016:87). This growing international interest in the Arctic, combined with increasingly global issues, then

raises questions regarding the ability of the Arctic states to upkeep their understanding of an exceptional Arctic.

As highlighted within the introductory quote, the presentation of the Arctic as exceptional is not neutral but enables agency related to the exceptionalised object. Low tensions in Arctic relations are only one such object. Competing depictions of exceptionalism center on the Arctic in terms of a “scramble for Arctic resources” (Lackenbauer & Dean 2020:333), an “indigenous homeland” (ibid:335), or, as in the EU’s case, an exceptional vulnerability to climate change. As current inter-state relations in the Arctic build upon a specific depiction of exceptionalism through detachment and desecuritization, competing depictions can potentially influence political routines in inter-state relations.

Focusing on the EU’s climate change discourse as an alternative exceptionalisation of the Arctic, this thesis aims to comprehend its correlation and contrasts with the concept of Arctic exceptionalism that lies at the foundation of current Arctic relations. The research question that I seek to answer within this thesis is therefore the following:

How does the construction of the Arctic as exceptional in the EU’s climate change discourse contrast with the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism and affect established routines therein?

1.1 Thesis Structure

The aim of this thesis is the comparison of the EU’s climate change discourse with the concept of Arctic exceptionalism to identify deviations, and subsequently, the discussion of the effect of these deviations on political routines in the Arctic.

There to, [Chapter 2](#) presents and explains the research design and the methodological choices that were made to answer the research question, whereas [Chapter 3](#) introduces the two theories that are applied within this thesis, securitization theory and ontological security theory. [Chapter 4](#) then presents the results of the analysis, which are subsequently discussed in [Chapter 5](#). Finally, [Chapter 6](#) sets out to summarize the thesis and answer the research question.

To account for a better and more transparent analytical process, the analysis is divided into three steps. After an outline of the context that is relevant for the analysis in [Section 4.1](#), the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is discussed and defined in [Section 4.2](#) to establish a baseline for the subsequent comparison as step one. Thereafter, the results of the analysis of the

EU's climate change discourse in its Arctic policy are presented through a discussion of the identified discursive strategies and the related securitizing move in [Section 4.3](#). Finally, the results of the analysis are compared and contrasted with the concept of Arctic exceptionalism in [Section 4.4](#). The aim here is to identify the deviations, which are then related to securitization and the effects on the established political routines in the Arctic using an analytical framework from ontological security.

1.2 Key Terms

The research question contains elements that need to be defined before diving deeper into the work. Within this thesis, the term *Arctic states* is used to refer to the eight states that have territories within the Arctic (Arctic Council 2022). These are the five littoral states to the Arctic Ocean, namely Norway, Denmark (through Greenland), Canada, and the USA, as well as Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. When referring to the *Arctic* as part of the climate change discourse in the EU's Arctic policy, this then refers to the "the area around the North Pole north of the Arctic Circle. It includes the Arctic Ocean and territories of the eight Arctic states" (European Commission 2008a:2).

The concept of *Arctic exceptionalism*, then, refers to the status of relations between the Arctic states. A detailed conceptualization is undertaken in [Section 4.2](#), according to which the concept can be summarized as a selective depiction of the Arctic as a peaceful and cooperative region that is mainly based on the compartmentalization of Arctic politics and the silencing of security matters as a notion of desecuritization.

Lastly, *established routines* refer to routinized relationships between states. Drawing upon a relational understanding of ontological security, routinized relationships between states contribute to the predictability of interactions, thereby lowering the perceived dangers of insecurity on the international level.

1.3 Acknowledgement of Recent Geopolitical Developments

At this point, it needs to be highlighted that work on this thesis started before the Russo-Ukrainian War escalated on February 24, 2022. The subsequent isolation of Russia on the international level included a freeze of cooperation in the Arctic (U.S. Department of State 2022) that has not been resumed at the time of finishing this thesis. Additionally, the accession

of Sweden and Finland to NATO, for which the process has been started, would severely alter security dynamics in the Arctic.

Nevertheless, I decided to continue with an examination of the depiction of the Arctic as exceptional. This is partly because work on the thesis had already started, but mainly, because exceptionalisms of the Arctic continue to stay relevant for two reasons. Firstly, Lackenbauer & Dean (2020) identify several different exceptionalisms, of which only one directly relates to what is considered the concept of Arctic exceptionalism within this thesis. Besides, a conflictual development in Arctic relations is another form of exceptionalism that they touch upon (ibid:332f). Secondly, concepts are constructed through both academics and everyday political practice (Berenskoetter 2017:155), which means that an examination of discourses of the exceptionalism of the Arctic contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of political practice.

2 Methodology

For a successful examination of the above-stated problem, this thesis follows the research process described below. Before elaborating on this process, it should be noted that how a researcher approaches and understands a subject is influenced by his understanding of reality and knowledge (Marsh, Ercan & Furlong 2018:177; Punch 2014:14ff).

The ontological point of departure for this thesis lies within *constructivism*, which sees reality as a social construct (Bryman 2012:28ff; Marsh, Ercan & Furlong 2018:178). The underlying epistemological assumptions are based on *interpretivism*, with the core notion that our understanding of a social phenomenon is shaped by our interpretation and understanding of it (Marsh, Ercan & Furlong 2018:189ff). The focus of research is therefore on these interpretations and understandings as well as the context and discourse within which they are produced. Ultimately, objective knowledge of reality and objective analysis does not exist in social sciences, as researchers themselves operate within and from social contexts that shape their research.

Having stressed this, I will outline the research process and the decisions that were made while designing this research project. This will first cover the research topic and the research goals, before going on to theoretical considerations that were made concerning the choice of theory and the use of the theory. Afterward, the case study design will be elaborated on and methodical considerations relating to data collection and data analysis will be clarified. Lastly, limitations of the research project are set forth.

2.1 Research Topic and Goals

The research process often relates to puzzles that the researcher found interesting (Bryman 2012:86ff; Toshkov 2018:222f). The starting point for this thesis was the increasing attention that non-Arctic actors pay to the Arctic because of climate change. More specifically, it was the dichotomy between this interest, originating in a global issue, and the compartmentalization of Arctic relations observable in the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism. Narrowing down this dichotomy to one outside player, I examine the EU's Arctic policy regarding its climate change discourse and its depiction of the Arctic as exceptional. In doing so, I aim to discover how this depiction deviates from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism and how this deviation affects established routines in the Arctic.

This alludes to the research goals pursued within this thesis. According to Toshkov (2018:223), “[t]he research question is intrinsically connected to the research goal.” He acknowledges that there are numerous potential goals and goes on to define three (ibid:223ff): firstly, *description*, which is concerned with describing the characteristics of an object of study in a scientific manner; secondly, *explanation*, which examines the causal or constitutive relationship between two objects of study; and lastly *interpretation*, which suggests that actions can be explained as “products of subjective reasons, meanings and beliefs” (ibid:225). This thesis falls into both explanatory and interpretive research. Firstly, as it attempts to identify how the EU’s climate change discourse affects the concept of Arctic exceptionalism, it can be considered explanatory research that examines the effects of a cause. Secondly, the research is operationalized through the interpretation of discourses, therefore containing interpretative elements.

2.2 Theoretical Considerations

Theories direct scientific research through frameworks for analyzing, explaining, and understanding puzzles (Savigny & Marsden 2011:5) that they help to identify (Toshkov 2016:56ff). They shape the research design, define relevant forms of data, and provide tools for identifying patterns as well as directions for explaining and understanding these patterns (Savigny & Marsden 2011:5; Toshkov 2018:225; Toshkov 2016:56ff). As theories have such profound implications for the execution of a research project, it is necessary to not only purposefully select a theory but to transparently outline the selection process and touch upon alternative theories and the reasoning why they were not chosen. Additionally, theories can interact with the data in different ways, depending on their use (Toshkov 2018:225f). The following section, therefore, will shortly clarify the selection process and the use of theory within this thesis.

2.2.1 Choice of Theory

Arctic relations can be, and have been, examined using a variety of different theories. The range of theories available to the researcher is influenced by his beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge as well as the aim of the study. When constructing the research design, I identified possible theories, established a basic knowledge of their key mechanisms and concepts, and evaluated their understanding of the problem at hand against the aim of this thesis. In the end, two theories were chosen.

The first theory used within this thesis is securitization theory. Going beyond military security, securitization theory considers threats from five sectors – military, environmental, economic, societal, and political (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998:8) – with the caveat that threats are not threats per se but are discursively constituted as such. This then refers to the framing of an existential threat to a referent object as part of a securitizing move by a securitizing actor, resulting in securitization only if the audience accepts the move (ibid:25). Securitization theory can account for the construction of the Arctic as exceptional as it centers on the mechanisms around the (de)securitization of an issue. If the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is understood to constitute normalized politics, then the EU’s climate change discourse can pose a securitizing move centering around the threat of climate change.

The second theory that is applied within this thesis is the theory of ontological security. Understood as “a subject’s capacity to uphold a stable view of its environment and thereby ‘go on’ with everyday life” (Browning & Joenniemi 2017:31), ontological security is constituted through biographical identity narratives and the routinization of relationships (Flockhart 2016) that shield against a feeling of insecurity. Within this thesis, the focus is put on the latter aspect, as the object under study is inter-state relations rather than state identity. Routinised relationships give room for the development of a trust system that centers around the predictability of others and influences how disruption of the routines can be managed (Mitzen 2006:350f). Ontological security was chosen as it provides a framework to account for the effects that dichotomies in the construction of the Arctic as exceptional have on inter-state relations in the Arctic.

As mentioned, these were not the only possibilities. The additional theories that were under consideration are named and briefly described in table 1.

| Theory | Description |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Normative Power Europe</i> | Normative power refers to the ability of an entity to “shape conceptions of ‘normal’” (Manners 2002:240ff). Applying this idea to the EU, Normative Power Europe refers to the notion that the EU possesses normative power based on its distinctive normative character that led to the development of five core norms, namely peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law, and human rights, as well as four minor norms, namely social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance, that are diffused by the EU. |
| <i>Environmental Geopolitics</i> | Environmental geopolitics is a critical approach to the study of the use of environmental themes in geopolitical arguments and power relations and helps to understand the association between environmental themes and security (O’Lear 2018:2f, 19ff). Three key observations, namely shortcomings in the definition of role and meaning of the environment, selective consideration of human agency, and a lack of regard for spatial aspects (ibid:5ff) serve as the starting point for the analysis of dominant discourses about human-environment relations. |

Table 1: Alternative Theories Under Consideration

Having described these theories, it is possible to discuss their exclusion. Firstly, environmental geopolitics aims at a different research goal. It can be used as an approach to critically assess how and why the environment is used in security discourse and would therefore examine why the EU uses climate change discourse in its Arctic policy in the way it does. Secondly, Normative Power Europe focuses on the normative capabilities of the EU and its ability to diffuse norms. Applying Normative Power Europe in the context of the thesis puts the efforts of the EU to advance measures against climate at the center of the analysis. Similar to environmental geopolitics, this focus entails a shift in the research goal, as it would instead allow for an understanding of the EU’s normative capabilities.

2.2.2 Use of Theory

The theoretical framework can take on distinct functions in social sciences that strongly influence how the framework is used. Toshkov (2018:226f) identifies six different mechanisms: firstly, deductive *theory development*, secondly, inductive *theory generation*, thirdly, *theory testing* by examining a derived hypothesis against empirical data, fourthly, theory-embedded *hypothesis testing* against empirical data, fifthly, *theory application* to a new empirical case, and lastly, the *abductive explanation of individual cases or events*. This thesis falls within theory application: First securitization theory is applied to the EU’s climate change discourse

and its construction of the Arctic as exceptional. Afterward, ontological security theory is used to explain the effect of deviations in the two exceptionalisms.

Generally, research in social sciences can be differentiated between *inductive* and *deductive* research. In inductive research, theory is derived from the findings of a study, whereas in deductive research, theory guides the study and results in observations (Bryman 2012:24ff). As in this thesis, the theoretical framework is applied, it is a deductive research project.

2.3 Research Design

The research design refers to the “structure that guides the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data” (Bryman 2012:45) and illustrates the prioritization of elements of the research process, such as causality, generalizability, understanding of behavior, and temporality (ibid). Popular research designs include experimental research, large-number observations, comparative research, and (single) case studies (Toshkov 2018:230ff).

2.3.1 Case Study Research

This thesis is a qualitative case study. Case studies entail “the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman 2012:66). They are a common research design in social sciences (Lamont 2015:125) and in securitization theory (Balzacq 2010:32ff) and comprise “in-depth studies of a single unit or historical episode in order to explain or understand other units or episodes” (ibid:11). Starting with the definition of the topic and the selection of a case to represent the topic, case studies are based on the systematic analysis of sources about the case (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:10). Case studies can center around a myriad of topics, such as events, processes, institutions, or social groups (ibid:15), and are characterized by the following aspects (ibid:15): firstly, they usually address a phenomenon, secondly, the phenomenon is studied in its natural spatial and temporal context, thirdly, case studies are often descriptive, and fourthly, they are usually exploratory.

Despite being a common research method, case studies are contested. Flyvbjerg (2011) has extensively investigated common criticisms of case studies and formulated answers to these critiques. He defines five misunderstandings (ibid:302ff): firstly, the idea that general knowledge has a higher worth than case-specific knowledge, which he refutes by highlighting

the lack of context-detached, general knowledge in social sciences; secondly, that, due to a lack of generalizability, case studies cannot contribute to scientific advancement, which he counters by highlighting how a carefully selected case may be generalizable; thirdly, the limitation of case studies to hypothesis deriving versus hypothesis testing and theory building, which he once again rebukes by referring to the strategic selection of cases; fourthly, a presumed verification bias, which he argues counts for all methods; and lastly, perceived difficulty of summarizing general ideas based on a specific case, which he contends to be partially true as summary might not be wanted for some cases. Additionally performing a methodical evaluation, he finds that the advantages of a case study lie in its depth, its validity, its contextual, processual, and causal understandings, and the potential of new research topics, while disadvantages include a selection bias, a weak understanding of occurrence, and unclear statistical significance (ibid:314).

Seeing that Flyvbjerg (2011) sufficiently argues for the validity of case studies and that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, especially when it comes to the in-depth understanding of context, processes, and causal relations, I decided to pursue a case study research project, starting with the selection of a representative cause that will be outlined in the following section.

2.3.2 Case Selection

The Arctic is presented as exceptional within the EU's global securitization efforts regarding climate change, which affects the Arctic at a higher speed than other parts of the globe. Therefore, presenting the Arctic as exceptional has the potential to allow for the argumentation for exceptional measures to deal with climate change. The overarching topic that this relates to is the securitization of climate change. Climate change forms a macrosecuritization within which the referent object is the entire globe. Within this framework, a securitizing move can be made by pulling a specific object into that global arena and attempting to launch exceptional measures in doing so. The case examined within this thesis is, therefore, a case that exemplifies the securitization of climate change on a more general level, and, more specifically, the exceptionalisation of an object to advance macrosecuritization on a global level, as well as the effect thereof on the pulled object.

As alluded to in the summary of Flyvbjerg's (2011) argumentation for case studies, the selection of a case is strategically important. He categorizes cases into four groups (ibid:307):

firstly, *extreme or deviant cases*, i.e., unusual cases; secondly, *maximum variation cases*, which include several cases that differ in one dimension; thirdly, *critical cases*, which pose least- or most-likely scenarios to validate hypotheses; and *paradigmatic cases*, which aim to establish a school of thought around a certain case. Global changes have a profound impact on the Arctic, while simultaneously, developments in the Arctic have global effects. For this reason, elevating the Arctic to levels of exceptionalism can be considered a critical case in form of a most-likely scenario. Nevertheless, due to the understanding that discourse is highly context-dependent, a further generalization of the results of this thesis is not one of the research goals.

2.4 Methodical Considerations

The research design and theoretical background of a research project strongly shape the analytical tools that are available to the researcher. This thesis falls into the domain of qualitative analysis. Qualitative methods refer to “data collection and analysis techniques or strategies that rely upon the collection of, and analysis of, non-numeric data” (Lamont 2015:79), including document-based research.

Securitization theory puts the focus on speech acts and the discursive construction of a threat, suggesting the conduction of a discourse analysis. This form of analysis “focuses on the interpretation of linguistic forms of communication” (Lamont 2015:91) in spoken or written, official or unofficial form. It is interested in both language patterns as well as the context in which the communication occurs (Paltridge 2012:1f). Several different approaches to discourse analysis exist. I have decided to follow Carabine’s (2001) approach to Foucauldian genealogical discourse analysis, as it is less concerned with the linguistic characteristics of discourse and more with the discursive production of power and knowledge (ibid:268). This is better suited to discuss the relational dynamics that are under investigation within this thesis. This section will outline Carabine’s approach and then give an overview of the data selected for the analysis and the process of data collection.

2.4.1 Foucauldian Genealogical Discourse Analysis

Michael Foucault was one of the most influential scholars in the development of discursive analysis (Keller 2013:43ff). Starting with a structural approach that focuses on discourse formation and practices rather than language patterns (ibid:46), his work moved along distinct phases until he developed a genealogical approach to discourse that underscores discursive processes and the relationship between power and knowledge (ibid:50).

Discourse, in his understanding, can be defined as “consisting of a group of related statements which cohere in some way to produce both meanings and effects in the real world” (Carabine 2001:268). Discourse therefore produces and constitutes the object that it talks about. Additionally, discourse is fluid, opportunistic, and draws on existing discourse to produce new meanings (ibid:268f). In Foucault’s understanding, discourse forms a constitutive triad with power and knowledge (ibid:275): As knowledge is a social construction produced through discourse and as power is constituted through discourse, power also relates to the production of knowledge. Carabine (ibid:275) argues that it “may help to think of discourses as functioning as sets of socially and historically constructed rules designating ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’”. A genealogical approach to discourse analysis focuses on the “development of knowledges and their power effects so as to reveal something about the nature of power/knowledge in modern society” (ibid:277). An additional concept is normalization, which refers to the process in which discourses establish a norm, i.e., what is normal and what is not (ibid:277f). Normalization is a form of power exertion and knowledge expression. The interplay of these concepts and discourse means that context plays a significant role in discourse analysis.

I found this approach to discourse analysis to be appropriate for this research project, as it examines the discourse over time and contains a set of agreements on what is part of relations and what is not. Similarly, the idea of routinising relationships implies the establishment of a norm that interactions are then weighed against, going in line with the idea of normalization. Additionally, it allows to identify discursive strategies within the EU’s Arctic policy and discuss these regarding securitization and deviations from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism.

Carabine (2001:278ff) presents an analytical approach that consists of eleven steps. The starting point is the topic selection and the identification of data. This is followed by a thorough reading of the data several times to get familiarized with the data. The aim is being able to identify themes, categories, and objects within the discourse. Having detected these aspects, the data is then examined for inter-relationship between discourses, discursive strategies, absences and silences and resistances and counter-discourses. Subsequently, the effects of the discourse are established, and the discourse is contextualized. Lastly, the importance of the awareness of the limitations of the research project is highlighted. She (2001:285) points out that these steps might not be as sequential as depicted, but instead are a dynamic process. Some steps might be conducted simultaneously, and information can be identified and added at all stages of the analysis. In line with this, I have adjusted the sequence of the steps as depicted in the figure 1.

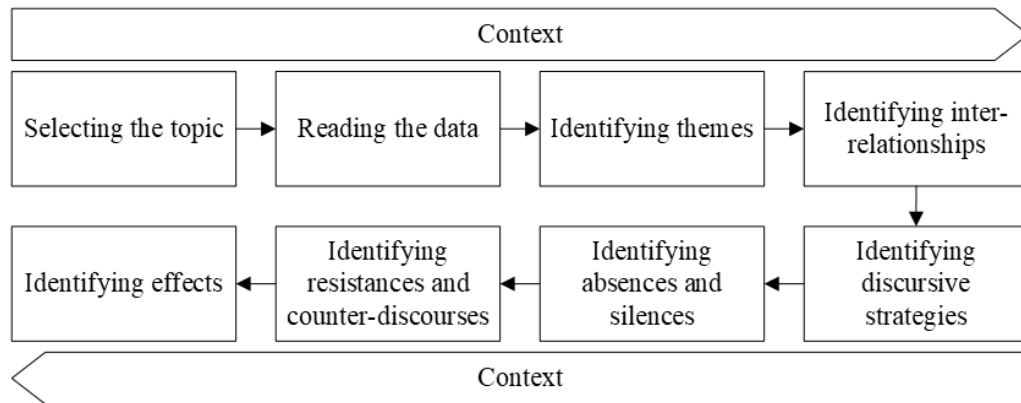


Figure 1: Conducting a Foucauldian genealogical discourse analysis
Own figure, based on Carabine (2001)

As depicted, the context within which the discourse takes place was considered throughout the entire process: Gathering information about the case was part of case selection. Therefore, the analysis was started with prior knowledge about the context that surrounds the discourse. Additionally, context plays significant role in the identification of discourse characteristics, such as absences. This reconfiguration of the process leads to an analysis consisting of eight steps that end with the identification of the effects of the discourse. As the research question aims at identifying effects, this last step is the cumulation of all prior steps and the continuous contextualization. Absences as well as resistances are identified and included in the discussion of discursive strategies. The term *discursive strategy* refers to “the ways that a discourse is deployed. It is the means by which a discourse is given meaning and force, and through which its object is defined” (Carabine 2001:288), which includes absences and resistances (ibid:296). Similarly, the effects are, where applicable, discussed within the discursive strategy itself or referred to as part of the securitization analysis.

2.4.2 Data Collection

The analysis in this thesis is twofold. On the one hand, due to the lack of agreed-upon definition, the concept of Arctic exceptionalism first must be conceptualized. This conceptualization of Arctic exceptionalism contains a summary of relevant academic publications. To identify these, a keyword search was undertaken in the database of Aalborg University’s library. The identified publications were then scanned for their significance for the xceptituzation. Those publications that include a definition of how Arctic exceptionalism can be understood were retained, resulting in a total of 20 academic publications that serve as the basis for the conceptualization (see table 2). In addition to these, Gorbachev’s

Murmansk speech (1987) is investigated to account for the desecuritization that took place after the Cold War.

Academic Publications

-
- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Crawford 2021; | • Gjørsv & Hodgons 2019; | • Käpylä & Mikkola 2019; |
| • Dodds 2020; | • Gjørsv, Lanteigne & Sam- | • Konyshv & Sergunin |
| • Doel, Wrakberg & Zeller | Aggrey 2020; | 2019; |
| 2014; | • Haftendorn 2011; | • Palosaari & Tynkkynen |
| • Exner-Pirot 2020a; | • Henrikson 2020; | 2015; |
| • Exner-Pirot 2020b; | • Heininen, Exner-Pirot & | • Pic & Lasserre 2019; |
| • Exner-Pirot 2013; | Barnes 2019; | • Young 2012; |
| • Exner-Pirot & Murray | • Heininen 2011; | • Østerud & Hønneland |
| 2017 | | 2014; |
| | | • Østhagen 2016; |
-

Table 2: Academic Publications for Conceptualizing Arctic Exceptionalism

On the other hand, the focus of this thesis is an analysis of the EU's Arctic policy. To identify official policy, data collection was restricted to the European Commission, as this is the EU body that is tasked with the external representation of the EU (European Union 2012: Art.17). Therefore, the data collection started with the four Communications from the European Commission from 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2021 that constitute the official EU Arctic policy, combined with two staff working documents that accompany the 2012 communication. Furthermore, to account for the presentation of the EU's Arctic policy towards outside stakeholders, I conducted a keyword search for the Arctic within the press corner of the European Commission, for the period between the 20 November 2008 and 31 December 2021, as the first EU Arctic policy was published in November 2008 and the fourth version in October 2021. Search results, excluding daily news and calendar events, were skimmed for the relation to the Arctic and excluded if they did not relate to the EU's Arctic policy. Documents that referred to the Arctic as an example of climate change were included as they relate to the issue on hand.

The data collection resulted in a total of 77 documents, which are distributed across the policy periods as depicted in table 3.

| Period | Number of Documents |
|--|----------------------------|
| <i>20 November 2008 – 25 June 2012</i> | 25 |
| <i>26 June 2012 – 26 April 2016</i> | 25 |
| <i>27 April 2016 – 12 October 2021</i> | 21 |
| <i>1 October 2021 – 31 December 2021</i> | 6 |

Table 3: Distribution of Collected Data

The description of context that is drawn upon to provide a better understanding of the setting of the analysis is generally based on secondary literature. Secondary literature in form of academic books and articles is also used in the remaining sections of this thesis. The collection of secondary sources was restricted to publications that are accessible via the library of Aalborg University.

2.5 Limitations

The methodological choices that were made while constructing the research design impose several limitations on this thesis that need to be highlighted but will nevertheless remain.

The first limitation concerns the single-case study research which this thesis consists of. The limitations of a case study are touched upon in [Section 2.3.1](#) and extensively elaborated on and critiqued in Flyvbjerg (2011). One issue that remains is the question of generalizability. The starting point for the puzzle that is examined within this thesis was a specific issue and the analysis is conducted using a method that gives a large amount of consideration to the specific context. As pointed out earlier, these choices were made, since the overarching generalization of the research result is not the aim of this thesis, which means that this is a limitation that does not impede the conduction of the analysis or the fulfillment of the research goals of this thesis.

A second limitation relates to the data that was used for the analysis. On the one hand, this includes the method of data collection, which was limited, as it was constrained to data that was recorded and made publicly available. Additional data can exist in two ways: firstly, in form of speeches or publications that are additional to the ones available in the press corner of the European Commission, which might not be recorded or accessible, and secondly, as internal classified documents that are not available for public use. While the second aspect cannot be

countered, the first aspect exists but its role can likely be diminished due to the lack of deviation within the discourse that is present in the analyzed documents. On the other hand, this limitation refers to the type of data that was used. This thesis conducts a document-based analysis that is not supplemented by other forms of data, such as interviews. This means that the analysis is solely based on the readings of the documents, in combination with existing research, and is subject to potential research biases.

Another limitation is that this thesis focuses on the securitizing move that is undertaken within the EU's Arctic policy, and not the entire securitization process. The examination does not include how Arctic states react to the securitizing move and whether they accept it or not.

3 Theories

Security theories can be divided into two overarching groups – a traditionalist approach focusing on a state-centric understanding of military and political security, and non-traditional approaches that emerged after the end of the Cold War and that attempt to widen security to other sectors and/or deepen it to other actors (Nyman 2018:101; Padrtova 2020: 30). This thesis uses two non-traditional approaches that emerged from criticism of the classical understanding of security: securitization theory and ontological security theory.

3.1 Securitization Theory

The Copenhagen School's securitization theory is a constructivist theory that centers around the premise that security threats do not objectively exist but are created through discursive performance (Nyman 2018:101). Securitization theory adds additional security sectors (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde's 1998:8). Besides the *military* sector, which is seen as the relationship between two states' defense and offense, and the *political* sector, referring to the stability of legitimacy of states and governments, three additional sectors were added: firstly, the *economic* sector, which contains the access the necessary resources to uphold state power, secondly, the *societal* sector, which relates to the stability of language, culture, religion and identity, and lastly, the *environmental* sector, which refers to the preservation of the biosphere.

Security in Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde's (1998) understanding is "the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics" (ibid:23). They define three stages on which an issue can rest (ibid:24f): firstly, it can be *nonpoliticized*, which means that it is not an element of public politics; secondly, it can be *politicized*, which means that it is an element of public politics and policy, and lastly, it can be *securitized*, means that it is understood to be an existential threat that requires special measures. Securitization, then, refers to the movement of an issue from politicized to securitized.

3.1.1 Securitization

Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998:21) define security as survival, as "when an issue is presented as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object". This phrase includes two of the key mechanism of securitization as depicted in figure 2 – a securitizing actor

performs a securitizing move towards an audience, namely a speech act in which he presents an existential threat to a referent object.

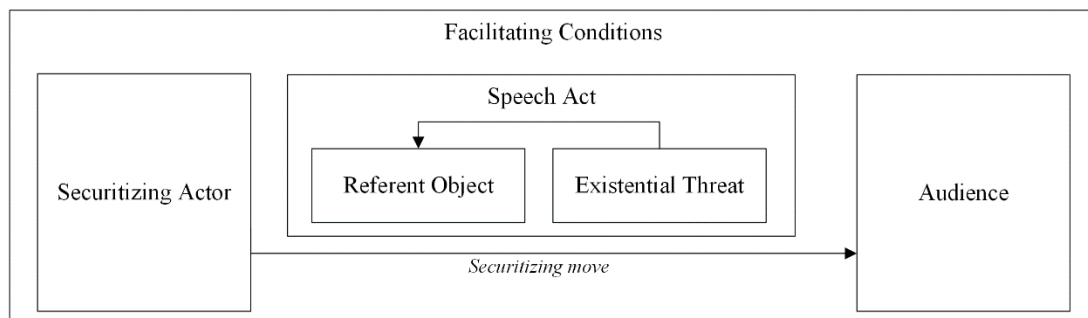


Figure 2: Mechanism of Securitization
Own figure, based on Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde (1998:21-47)

A *securitizing actor* is the actor that performs the securitizing move (ibid:36,40). Typically, that actor is in a position of authority (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:40ff; Nyman 2018:106). The securitizing actor is different from the *referent object*, which is the object that is seen as threatened by an existential threat but that has a right to survival and therefore must be protected (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:36; Nyman 2018:106). An *existential threat* is the threat towards the referent object that can only be understood within this relation, it does not exist universally (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:21). The presentation of the existential threat for the referent object is considered a *speech act*, meaning it is performative and by saying something, something is done (ibid:26). The *securitizing move* contains the speech act and is only successful if its *audience* accepts it, leading to securitization (ibid:25). Securitization is, therefore, the result of an intersubjective process (ibid:31). The securitization move does not take place in a vacuum but is affected by *facilitating conditions*. These can either be internal to the speech act and of linguistic character, or external, then referring to both the social position of the securitizing actor and features of the presented threat. (ibid:33). Lastly, the existential threat is presented as urgent and as needing extraordinary measures to be countered (ibid:26).

The speech act necessitates further clarification. It is based on speech act theory, which assumes that something is being done by talking, i.e., that language is performative (Vuori 2017:66). It can, for example, explain, order, or threaten (ibid). Speech acts have three levels of analysis: *locutionary*, referring to “an act of saying something” (ibid), *illocutionary*, referring to “an act in saying something” (ibid), and *perlocutionary*, referring to “an act by saying something” (ibid). Illocutionary forces produce perlocutionary effects (ibid). Wæver

(2015:123) asserts that the speech act in securitization analysis lies on the illocutionary level of transformation through the speech act and is less concerned with its effects (perlocutionary level). A speech act in form of a securitizing move, therefore, is analyzed for its transformative aspects, i.e., how it securitizes the referent object, rather than the effects of this securitization. Within the Copenhagen School, the speech act relates to specific rhetorical features regarding survival, urgency, and extraordinary measures (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:26).

There is no lack of criticism of this approach, which has led to further conceptualizations. Examples include Hansen (2011) with a post-structuralist critique, Salter (2008:326) fearing an “under-development of social aspects of securitization” and Balzacq (2005, 2015), who develops a sociological approach to securitization. Vuori (2017:70f) emphasizes that securitization theory offers a lot of possibilities for this kind of variation and expansion, but also highlights the value of keeping the core intact and adding or adjusting elements depending on the research framework. Therefore, while acknowledging that securitization theory has developed into different variations, this thesis will follow the securitization mechanism outlined in figure 2.

3.1.2 Macrosecuritization

Buzan & Wæver (2009) have conceded that the Copenhagen School has mainly focused on mid-level securitizations, where “egoistical collective political actors (often but not always states) mainly construct their securitisations against [...] each other” (ibid:254). They introduced the concept of *macrosecuritization* to account for securitization that takes place between this mid-level and the system level that references humankind (ibid). Macrosecuritizations follow the same mechanism as mid-level securitizations but are typically more complex as they can cover several mid-level securitizations and several sectors (ibid:257f), extending the analysis by three levels (ibid:257ff): firstly, the level of comprehensiveness, ranging from niche securitizations, such as the war on drugs, to inclusive ones, such as the global war on terror; secondly, the unit level, ranging from individual to global; and lastly, the proportional degree to which the audience is convinced.

These three levels can be explained using climate change as an example (ibid:257f): On the unit level, it is global, as it affects all of humankind, but on the level of acceptance it varies due to differing understandings of urgency, and the same goes for its comprehensiveness, as it partially covers several issues. Climate change can be defined as *a physical threat universalism*

that is presented as threatening humankind globally (ibid:261). Importantly, though, the presentation as universal does not equal universal participation (ibid:264).

3.1.3 Desecuritization

Desecuritization refers to “shifting of issues out of emergency mode and into the normal bargaining processes of the political sphere” (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998:4). Three options for desecuritization are given (Roe 2004:284): firstly, the avoidance of presenting issues in terms of security, preventing securitization in the first place; secondly, if the issue is already securitized, the reaction in ways that prevent further security dilemmas; and lastly, the move of the issue from the area of securitization back to normal politics, i.e., a move back along the three stages of nonpoliticized, politicized, and securitized.

Roe (2004:285) argues that the avoidance of securitization is better-termed non-securitization rather than desecuritization. He argues that securitized issues can either be managed or transformed. The management of securitized issues does not fully include desecuritization as the normalization of politics is not the goal and the security rhetoric from the speech act will continue to be present. Transformation, on the other hand, refers to the normalization of emergency politics. Transforming securitized issues can take place through three strategies (ibid:258ff). Firstly, an *objectivist* strategy, which argues that there is “objective content against which subjective notions of threat will either be real or illusory” (ibid), meaning that subjective ideas of threat are neutralized by objective means. Secondly, a *constructivist* strategy, which focuses on understanding how the issue became a threat. And lastly, a *deconstructivist* strategy, in which the construction of the threat is changed from within by changing the presentation of the issue.

Independently of the chosen strategy, the aim of desecuritization is the reverse mechanism of securitization, the removal of emergency measures, and the deconstruction of the perceived threat to return to normalized politics or to avoid further escalation. The Copenhagen School adds a normative element to the theory by seeing desecuritization as the ideal state (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998:29).

3.2 Ontological Security Theory

Ontology is concerned with the “nature of being” (Merriam-Webster 2022b). Derived from this, ontological security is centered around the security of being. While it was originally

introduced by psychiatrist R.D. Laing (1965), ontological security was further elaborated on and conceptualized by sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991). Building on Giddens, IR scholars first introduced ontological security to the study of international relations in the late 1990s (Huysmans 1998; McSweeney 1999), followed by several key publications in the 2000s (Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008). Since then, a growing number of scholars in the field have used ontological security as the framework for their studies (among others Browning 2018; Browning & Joenniemi 2013; Browning & Joenniemi 2010; Heritage & Lee 2020).

3.2.1 The Roots of Ontological Security

Ontological security was conceptualized within sociology by Anthony Giddens, whom IR scholars build upon. Giddens (1991) extensively discusses how late-modernity affects the individual and self-identity. He argues that late modernity is a dynamic system characterized by three elements (ibid:15): *the separation of time and space*, *the disembedding of social institutions*, and *institutional reflexivity*. This dynamic can affect the relationship between identity and modern institutions (ibid:32). This can cause individuals to feel *anxiety*, which Giddens generally defines as “the natural correlate of dangers of all type” (ibid:13), and then later relates to identity by saying it is “felt as a ‘cosmic’ experience related to the reactions of others and to emerging self-esteem” (ibid:45).

At this stage, the individual comes into play. Giddens’ premise is that there are two things that an individual must always know (ibid:35f): what it is doing, and why. This awareness requires the formulation of a shared framework against which the actions are judged and that ensures the reliability of the context of social interaction, which helps to reduce anxiety. Anxiety can cause individuals to feel *dread* – “the prospect of being overwhelmed by anxieties that reach to the very roots of our coherent sense of ‘being in the world’” (ibid:37). The routinization of everyday interactions shields against this. Confidence in this routinization develops during the infantile stage in what Giddens refers to as *basic trust*, the “trust in the continuity of others and in the object-world” (ibid:242). Giddens considers basic trust a *protective cocoon*, the “defensive protection which filters out potential dangers impinging from the external world” (ibid:244). Basic trust is the condition for the formulation of *self-identity* (ibid:42).

Importantly, self-identity in Giddens’ account is not a given. Instead, he sees it as a *reflexive project of the self* that “consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised,

biographical narratives” (ibid:5). Such narratives of self are “the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others” (ibid:243). Therefore, self-identity is a construction done by the individual, using autobiographic narratives. These core mechanisms are depicted in figure 3.

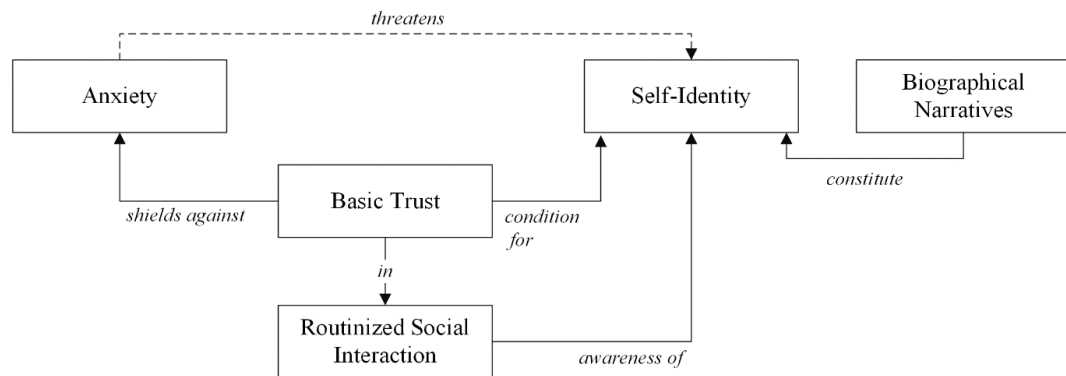


Figure 3: Core mechanisms of Ontological Security
Own figure, based on Giddens (1991)

Giddens argues that all individuals create a structure for ontological security (ibid:44). If an individual is ontologically secure, the individual can answer four *existential questions* concerning (ibid:47ff), firstly, *existence and being*, referring to the existence of an external reality and the establishment of social routines; secondly, *finitude and human life*, concerning the way of approaching the finite nature of human life; thirdly, *the experience of others*, relating to the existence of other individuals and the subjective interpretation of their actions; and lastly, *the continuity of self-identity*, referring to the aforementioned reflexive process of the self. *Ontological security*, as defined by Giddens, is then “a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual” (ibid:243).

3.2.2 The Transfer of Ontological Security to International Relations

Ontological security was first transferred and conceptualized within IR by authors who were critical of the traditional realist interpretation of security and aimed to produce a more comprehensive framework for security analysis, such as Huysmans (1998) and McSweeney (1999). These two early works were followed by a few key publications in the 2000s (Kinnvall 2004; Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008).

Importantly, the approaches of these three authors differ in two key points that are still debated within the field (Ejdus 2020:11f). On the one hand, they take a different approach to

the level of analysis. Kinnvall (2004) discusses the appeal of collective identity formation in response to globalization. In contrast, both Mitzen (2006) and Steele (2008) put the state as an actor at the center of their analysis. Mitzen (2006:351f) gives three key arguments to defend the use of states as actors: firstly, treating states as actors is routinely done in IR scholarship, secondly, states provide ontological security for their citizens who, in turn, get attached to this group identity, and lastly, such a treatment can help to frame macro-level patterns. Steele (2008:17ff) adds to this, as a fourth argument, that states are represented by individuals that are devoted to the same self-identity of the state.

But while Mitzen and Steele agree on the level of analysis, their approach toward the source of ontological security differs. This constitutes the second debate which centers around the question of whether “interactions and the international environment are the main source of ontological anxiety” (Zarakol 2010:6), or whether insecure interactions are “merely a consequence of the state’s own uncertainty about its own identity?” (ibid:6). Zarakol (ibid:6f) finds three approaches: Firstly, Mitzen (2006), who, in her eyes, takes a sociological approach to state identity being constructed through routinized external relationships rather than intrinsic factors; secondly, Steele (2008), who approaches state identity as a result of its reflexive understanding of its own identity through biographical continuity rather than its external social relations, relating identity to self; and lastly, Kinnvall (2004), who, she argues, uses a “middle ground approach” (Zarakol 2010:7) that takes into account both biographical continuity of the identity narrative and external relations.

In addition to these debates, ontological security scholarship within IR has also been driven by the development of critiques of the early approaches (e.g., Browning and Joenniemi 2017; Flockhart 2016; Pratt 2017). Taking a different approach, based on relational sociology, Pratt (2017) shifts the referent object from the self onto the social arrangement that the self is in. This emphasizes the stability and coherence of the social context of an actor, which is secured instead of the self (ibid:81). He bases his approach on three principles (ibid:81): firstly, these social arrangements must be considered within and as part of a social context whose stability is the result of balancing acts undertaken by actors; secondly, he considers selfhood as the result of a process; and thirdly, he considers agency as transactional in the sense that it is constructed through interaction between actors and their context.

3.2.3 An Integrated Relational Ontological Security Framework

The theoretical framework used within draws on Mitzen's (2006) approach to the mechanisms of ontological security with slight adjustments to account for more recent developments in the field.

Mitzen (2006) discusses the security dilemma in IR from the perspective of ontological security, claiming that this conceptualization helps to explain persisting conflict between states. Actors need to feel secure about their identity. As identity is formed in relation to others, ontological security is mainly achieved by routinizing relationships. Mitzen argues that actors then get attached to the certainty that these routines provide, even if this is a contradiction to their physical security (ibid:342). She distinguishes between two basic trust systems (ibid:350f): firstly, a flexible system, in which the amount of trust is high enough to be able to handle small disruptions in routine, as there is confidence that routines will either be re-established or adjusted; and secondly, rigid systems, which put routines into focus instead of trust so that disruptions can threaten the trust system. Therefore, ontological security affects the ability to manage change (ibid:351). Within her analysis, Mitzen treats states as actors. She connects two assumptions about state identity. She understands state identities as "constituted and sustained by social relationships rather than being intrinsic properties of the state themselves" (ibid:354) and she assumes that interaction can transform state identity (ibid:354).

Her approach is adjusted to account for more recent developments: On the one hand, the conflation of self and identity is lifted, following Browning & Joenniemi's (2017) critique of this fusion. This allows for the acknowledgment of the role of biographical narratives in identity formation while focusing on the routinization of social interactions and broadens the understanding of ontological security. This enables the second adjustment, which follows Pratt's (2017) shift of the referent object of security away from the self – and, as it is often conflated with identity, self-identity – to the social arrangement that is formed by routinized social interactions. The resulting framework is depicted in figure 4 and explained below.

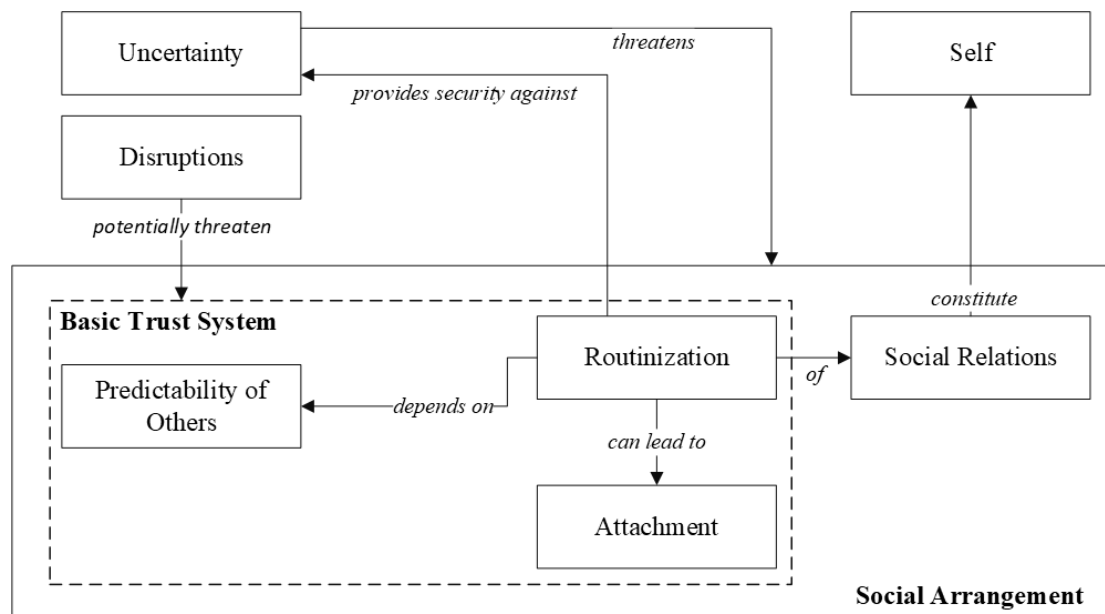


Figure 4: An integrated relational framework of Ontological Security
Own figure, based on a combination of Mitzen (2006) and Pratt (2017)

Following Browning and Rumelili (2017:31), ontological security is understood to be “a subject’s capacity to uphold a stable view of its environment and thereby ‘go on’ with everyday life.” An actor can draw ontological security either from biographical identity-narratives or from routinized social interactions. The relational security framework focuses on the latter, arguing that actors need stability and predictability in social interactions. Social interactions take place within a *social arrangement*, which is “a structured configuration of transactions between actors, which both serves as the social environment in which action occurs and provides the social material” (Pratt 2017:81). Since a social interaction serves as a source of a feeling of ontological security, actors are interested in maintaining the coherence of the social arrangement that they are in (ibid:81). Within this social arrangement, social interactions are routinized and structured.

At this point, it is possible to integrate Mitzen’s (2006) concept of ontological security, which focuses on the routinization of social relations. While she argues that this routinization consists of habitual, unconscious reactions (ibid:346f) that provide instructions on how to act, Pratt (2017:81) argues that habit is exceeded, and a conscious structuration of social interaction takes place within a social arrangement. This then provides the basis for the development of a *basic trust system* that influences the effect of disruptions, depending on whether it is a flexible or a rigid system. If such disruption occurs, which is then more likely to happen in rigid trust systems, Pratt (2017:82f) proposes three mechanisms on how an actor can preserve the social

arrangement. Firstly, he can insert intervene in foreign conflicts to reaffirm existing normative structures (*refereeing*), secondly, he can affirm commitment to normative structures even if it is superficial commitment and the normative structure is not believed in (*performative deference*), or he can block any action that would change the current normative structures within a system (*obstructive resistance*).

3.3 Synergies of the Theoretical Frameworks

Ontological Security Theory and Securitization Theory are both constructivist theories (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998:204f; McDonald 2018:49) that analyze security on distinct levels, making it possible to draw synergies.

On the one hand, securitization theory can contribute to the model of ontological security theory that is presented above. The understanding of security threats as being constructed gives a clear guideline on when disruptions have the potential to threaten the trust system that developed. That is to say, a disruption must be constructed as a threat to the referent object, i.e., the social arrangement. If this condition is not met, the potential is out there but unrealized.

On the other hand, ontological security theory can contribute to securitization theory in two ways. Firstly, securitization theory focuses on how something is securitized rather than the effect of securitization. Here, ontological security can dock, as it provides a framework for the examination of the effects of securitization on the social arrangement. Secondly, ontological security theory can add to the understanding of macrosecuritization. Buzan and Wæver (2009:267) argue that pure universality is an illusion and instead, universality is attempted to be achieved through focusing on something, combining different mid-level securitizations. They contend that a horizontal form of interlinking can raise “interestingly to difficult questions about how to theorize the more psychological level of fear or maybe rather anxiety in society” (ibid:267). This is where ontological security can attach as it centers around the notion of anxiety and insecurity.

4 Climate Change Discourse and Arctic Exceptionalism

The idea of the Arctic as an exceptionally peaceful region arose from its inter-state dynamics after the Cold War. The Arctic experienced conflict during World War II as well as further militarization during the Cold War due to strategic interests (Exner-Pirot 2020a:93). While there were unsuccessful calls for demilitarization during the Cold War era, it was not until its end and the subsequent post-Cold War period that initiatives aiming at increasing cooperation between all Arctic states became more fruitful (Nord 2016:11f; Exner-Pirot 2020a:94f). In 1987, Mikhail Gorbachev expressed the idea of the Arctic becoming a “zone of peace” (Gorbachev 1987:4). This show of increasing willingness to cooperate led to the creation of the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS) in 1991, promoted by Finland (Nord 2016:13; Exner-Pirot 2020a:95). Subsequently, a push for the further formalization of Arctic relations through the establishment of an intergovernmental forum on behalf of Canadian initiative led to the founding of the Arctic Council in 1996 (Nord 2016:14ff; Exner-Pirot 2020a:96f). The mandate of the Arctic Council was primarily focused on sustainable development and environmental protection, explicitly excluding security matters from its scope (Arctic Council 1996).

In contrast to the cooperative developments throughout the 1990s, the 2000s brought potential ruptures as expected impacts of climate change and estimated natural resources reignited strategic interest and military investment. In particular, the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment in 2004, the planting of the Russian flag on the seabed of the North Pole in 2007, and the US Geological Survey with its estimate of hydrocarbon in the Arctic are presented as a challenge for Arctic cooperation (Exner-Pirot 2020a:98ff), leading to discourse about a “scramble for the Arctic” (Pic & Lasserre 2019:5), despite ongoing cooperation efforts by Arctic states (Exner-Pirot 2020a:99). These new dynamics have caused newspapers, popular media as well as some scientists to discuss an increased potential of conflict in the Arctic (Young 2012:170). Nevertheless, Arctic states have repeatedly reasserted their interest in continued cooperation and peace in the region, even as relations soured elsewhere in the world.

However, the persistence of the characterization of Arctic inter-state relations using the underlying ideas of Arctic exceptionalism does not equal the disappearance of countering voices. Instead, the construction of the Arctic as exceptional can take various forms (Lackenbauer & Dean 2020). Competing discourses influence how their referent object is constructed and understood to be, thereby affecting the possibility of agency. For this reason,

this analysis centers around the concept of Arctic exceptionalism and a competing depiction of the Arctic within the EU's climate change discourse in its Arctic policy.

The analysis is divided into four sections. In the first section, the case that is examined within this thesis, the EU's Arctic policy and the portrayal of climate change therein, is contextually positioned to allow for a better presentation of the analysis results. This is followed by a conceptualization of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism to illustrate how it is understood within this thesis. Afterwards, the analysis of the discursive strategies relating to climate change within the EU's Arctic policy is presented, focusing on securitizing efforts. Lastly, the impact of deviations between the depiction of the Arctic as exceptional within the EU's climate change discourse and within the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is examined. For this purpose, the two are first contrasted and then discussed through the application of the integrated relational ontological security framework.

4.1 Contextual Positioning of the Analysis

In line with Carabine's (2001) approach, the information that is outlined in this section assisted in understanding the discourse strategies that were identified within the EU's Arctic policy. This information serves as a brief overview to enable a better understanding of analytical arguments made throughout the remaining thesis and does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the issues presented, as that would exceed the scope of this thesis. The section starts with a brief introduction to the development of climate change as a security threat, followed by an overview of the EU's Arctic policy. Subsequently, a brief outline of the development of the relationship between Arctic states will be given. Lastly, it will shortly present the issue of climate change in the context of the Arctic.

4.1.1 The Development of Climate Change as a Security Threat

The EU has been identified as a leader in global efforts against climate change (Oberthür & Dupont 2021; Parker, Karlsson & Hjerpe 2017). Climate change gained traction as an issue in international politics in the 1990s and since then, the EU has attempted to influence efforts against climate change on an international level (Oberthür & Dupont 2021:1095f) with a focus on multilateral actions (Bäckstrand & Elgström 2013:1371). Throughout negotiations on action against climate change, the EU has pushed binding agreements for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (Bäckstrand & Elgström 2013:1375ff; Oberthür & Dupont 2021:1101ff), be it during the initial consultations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate

Change in the first half of the 1990s, as part of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen, or during negotiations for the 2015 Paris Agreement. While early EU efforts were successful, 2009 posed as a failure for the EU agenda, as it was generally considered a pushback for climate change efforts and, relating to EU objectives specifically, did not include a binding agreement (Bäckstrand & Elgström 2013: 1377f), yet the EU recovered and reached its objectives for the 2015 Paris Agreement (Oberthür & Dupont 2021:1102).

Parallel to international negotiations about climate politics, the security implications of climate change were highlighted increasingly (Kalliojärvi 2020:9). But while climate change has been put onto the global security agenda, its specific conception in terms of the form of threat, the threatened object, and necessary measures derived from this threat vary (von Lucke 2020:2ff). Additionally, from an academic perspective, the successful securitization of climate change is disputed, as many scholars argue that international climate change efforts are still within the realm of normal politics (ibid:6). However, this does not mean that there is a lack of securitizing moves. On the contrary, a consciousness of the shortcomings of existing climate politics is discernible and securitizing moves take place on various levels, for example from the EU or civil society, such as the Fridays for Future movement (von Lucke 2020:5). Nevertheless, there is an inconsistency between securitizing moves and adopted measures that are either not ambitious or delayed, indicating a lack of acceptance of the securitizing move (Dupont 2019:373f). For the EU as a securitizing actor, the target audience is twofold (ibid:374ff): On the one hand, there is the internal audience, i.e., EU citizens and member states, on the other hand, the external audience, i.e., the international community. The external legitimacy depends on internal action and the acceptance thereof by the domestic audience, so to say, the “ability to act internally and set an example” (ibid:374).

Internally, the EU put forth an ambitious policy package in form of the European Green Deal in 2019. Aiming to implement measures against environmental challenges as well to work towards the implementation of the sustainable development goals, the European Green Deal sets out two major policy objectives in the realm of climate politics – zero net emissions by 2050, and economic growth that is independent of natural resources (European Commission 2019a:2f). While the European Green Deal lies out measures taken within the EU, it also acknowledges that climate change requires a global response and emphasizes the importance of the Paris agreement as well as the necessity of additional cooperation to advance the measures against climate change (ibid:20f).

4.1.2 The European Union's Arctic Policy

The EU can be linked to the Arctic in diverse ways (Poojary & Ramdas 2020; Raspotnik & Stepien 2020): On the one hand, there is the European Arctic, as with Finland and Sweden, two of its member states are Arctic states¹, where EU regulation is directly applicable. On the other hand, there is the non-European Arctic, where the EU attempts to gain influence in other ways. Iceland and Norway are connected to the European Economic Area. Moreover, the EU contributes to Arctic research, shapes norms that affect the Arctic and impacts the Arctic economically and environmentally (ibid). Consequently, the EU has developed a policy towards the Arctic that outlines its key priorities and interests.

The starting point for the development of the EU Arctic policy can be found in 2007 (Offerdal 2011:867ff; Weber & Romanyshyv 2011:852ff; Wegge 2012:13ff) with the publication of the *Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union*, which included a passage requiring the European Commission to provide a strategy for the Arctic in 2008 (European Commission 2007:13). While this passage was likely included on Norwegian initiative, geopolitical developments of the time might also have played a role, as the Russian flag planting incident took place shortly prior (Offerdal 2011:867). This incident is explicitly mentioned in *Climate Change and International Security*, a paper from the High Representative to the European Commission outlining climate change as a security threat (European Commission and High Representative 2008:12). This document called for the development of an Arctic strategy that considered geopolitical developments (ibid:15). Similarly, both climate change and the flag incident are mentioned in a resolution passed by the European Parliament about *Arctic Governance* (European Parliament 2008:41). Most controversially, this resolution contained a section suggesting negotiations regarding an international treaty inspired by the Antarctica Treaty to ensure the protection of the Arctic (ibid:43). However, this was not included when the European Commission released its joint communication about the EU and the Arctic just a month later. It outlined three policy objectives – firstly, the protection and preservation of the Arctic, secondly, the promotion of the sustainable use of resources, and lastly, Arctic multilateral governance (European Commission 2008a:2).

While there has been a back and forth between the EU institutions and three more joint communications from the European Commission in 2012, 2016, and 2021, these three

¹ Denmark is an EU member state, but Greenland itself is not, although connections remain

objectives have stayed at the core of the Arctic policy. After the launch of the European Green Deal, the European Commission started a reflection on its Arctic policy (European Commission 2020). Increasing the legitimacy of the focus set throughout the policy document, the European Commission conducted a public consultation as part of the formulation of the 2021 policy, which resulted in the confirmation of the relevance of these three issues (European Commission, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, European External Action Service 2021).

Noteworthy is that, while the EU's Arctic policy centers around climate change and sustainable development, its application for observer status at the Arctic Council has not yet been approved (Raspotnik & Stepien 2020:142), despite these issues also being in focus there. In 2014, the EU's ban on seal products led to a Canadian veto, whereas later the cooled down Russia-EU relations hindered approval (Nord 2016:38, 63).

4.1.3 The Dual Character of Climate Change in the Arctic

The *Arctic Climate Impact Assessment*, released in 2004, presented a bleak outlook on the impacts of climate change in the Arctic (Hassol 2004:10ff). Its findings included that climate had increased at a much faster rate in the Arctic than globally and caused permafrost, ice sheets, glaciers, and sea ice to melt as well as the snow season to shorten. The warming Arctic was found to have severe implications for the Arctic environment, including a change in migratory patterns, the introduction of new species due to migration north, and the endangerment of Arctic species, as well as for Arctic populations, including the introduction of new health risks, an increase in extreme weather situations, and interference with traditional lifestyles, such as hunting traditions, and food safety. Additionally, a warming Arctic was found to have implications for the global ecosystem, fastening the speed of climate change, contributing to rising sea levels, and altering global biodiversity. The most recent Arctic climate change update upheld these findings and confirmed the continuingly stronger impact of climate change in the Arctic compared to other parts of the globe (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme 2021:2ff).

While climate change is associated with negative impacts on the Arctic environment, it also provides opportunities for increased human activity and potential economic benefits. On the one hand, this is related to the area of shipping, as a decrease in sea ice is expected to extend the period during which the Arctic Sea routes are shippable in the future (Hassol 2004:83;

Lindstad, Bright & Strømman 2016:26; Østreng et al. 2013:11). Yet at least on the Russian Northern Sea Route, the major use is currently domestic in nature (Gunnarsson 2021). On the other hand, the Arctic is perceived as resource-rich – an attention-receiving publication by the US Geological Survey estimated substantial amounts of undiscovered oil and gas in the Arctic (United States Geological Survey 2008). While oil and gas exploration has taken place in the Arctic since the 1970s (Gulas et al. 2017:57), melting sea ice is expected to increase possibilities for resource development (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme 2007:32; Hassol 2004:11 😊). The economic potential of resource extraction in the Arctic has been considered a paradox (Palosaari & Tynkkynen 2015:91; Palosaari 2019; Schunz, De Botselier & López Piqueres 2021; Sörlin 2021:326), referring to the relationship between climate change, oil, and gas, with the former accelerating access to the latter and the latter reinforcing the effects of the former.

4.2 The Concept of Arctic Exceptionalism

Relations between the eight Arctic states in recent history can be divided into three distinct phases (Heininen, Exner-Pirot & Barnes 2019:4). Firstly, the Cold War period from the 1950s until the 1980s can be characterized by military importance. It was followed by a transition from the 1980s to the 1990s, during which focus shifted from military and strategic interest to growing environmental concerns and budding cooperation. Finally, the post-Cold War period since the 2000s has been shaped by the Arctic states' commitment to cooperation and geopolitical stability despite military presence in the region.

It is this shift from Cold War tensions to lasting stability and cooperation between major powers that has given rise to the moniker *Arctic exceptionalism* in academia in reference to Arctic inter-state relations. The term exceptionalism refers to “the condition of being different from the norm” (Merriam-Webster 2022a). Relating thereto, within scholarship about the Arctic, the term *Arctic Exceptionalism* has been used to summarize key characteristics of the Arctic that differentiate it from the rest of the world, that it is “exempt from ‘normal’ drivers of international affairs” (Lackenbauer & Dean 2020:327). Yet there is not one singular understanding of what makes the Arctic exceptional. Arctic exceptionalism is often connected to the idea of the Arctic as a distinct region and has been discussed and criticized from different theoretical backgrounds, including, but not limited to, region-building (Keskitalo 2004, 2007), regional security complex theory (Chater & Greaves 2014; Exner-Pirot 2013; Greaves 2019), complex interdependence (Byers 2017) and the English School (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017).

Often, Arctic Exceptionalism is related to both multilateralism and institutionalism (Lackenbauer & Dean 2020:329) and can stand in contradiction with more realist readings of Arctic politics. Additionally, underlying notions of regionalization and region-building are open to criticism, as the degree and influence of regionalism in the Arctic are contested (Ingimundarson 2014).

Due to the differing approaches and lack of a unanimous definition, it is, therefore, necessary to first conceptualize the way Arctic Exceptionalism is understood within this thesis.

4.2.1 Conceptualizing Arctic Exceptionalism

Throughout academic literature, four themes are repeatedly touched upon concerning Arctic exceptionalism – compartmentalization, cooperation, peace, and Arctic diplomacy. It is important to note that these themes have interfaces and overlap in practice, the descriptive separation undertaken here serves mostly analytical purposes.

Firstly, the *compartmentalization of Arctic relations* refers to the isolation of Arctic political dynamics and a degree of insulation against geopolitical developments (Dodds 2020:267; Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:51; Pic & Lasserre 2019:2). Arctic inter-state relations and cooperation have shown resilience against worsening relations between Russia and Western states, which is the result of a conscious choice based on shared interests in the region (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:56). The cooperative relations between Russia and Western states in the Arctic stand in contrast to more conflictual relations in other geographical areas both historically (Gjørsv & Hodgson 2019:2) and currently (Exner-Pirot 2020b:316; Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:55, 59), making Russian-Western dynamics in the Arctic a key element of Arctic exceptionalism. In addition to this geographically oriented compartmentalization, Arctic cooperation is also separated along thematic issues. From the 1990s onwards, environmental, and societal issues have been the common denominator for cooperation, while security and military issues have mostly been silenced (Young 2012:167). They are explicitly excluded from the agenda of the Arctic Council (Dodds 2020:264), and if cooperation takes place in this regard, it relates to specific issues such as environmental (Heininen 2011:33) or maritime issues (Østhagen 2016).

Secondly, Arctic inter-state relations are characterized by *cooperation*. Cooperation between Arctic states is centered around common environmental (Heininen 2011:32; Palosaari & Tynkkynen 2015:88f) and marine challenges (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:57; Exner-Pirot

2020b:313) and common interests (Doel, Wrakberg & Zeller 2014:5f; Heininen, Exner-Pirot & Barnes 2019:5), including security and sovereignty, sustainable economic and societal development, environmental protection, scientific research, and search and rescue (Exner-Pirot 2020b:39). These interests and challenges lie within the domain of soft security and low politics (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:53, Konyshev & Sergunin 2019:690; Østerud & Hønneland 2014:159) and have induced the realization that cooperation is a necessity (Henrikson 2020:22). It is therefore of interest for the Arctic states that relations in the Arctic stay cooperative.

Thirdly, and closely related thereto, Arctic relations are characterized by *peace* and the absence of conflict. On the one hand, this is a result of the physical characteristics of the Arctic, such as it being ocean-based (Exner-Pirot 2013:127; Exner-Pirot 2020b:314), sparsity, and harsh conditions (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:58; Gjørsv, Lanteigne & Sam-Aggrey 2020:2). On the other hand, peaceful relations relate to conscious efforts by Arctic states to normalize relations after the Cold War. These efforts can be traced back to Mikhail Gorbachev's Murmansk speech, in which he called for an Arctic "zone of peace" (Exner-Pirot 2020a:95; Gorbachev 1987:4), initiating the process that would lead to the institutionalization of low tensions and stability in the Arctic (Haftendorn 2011:338; Heininen 2011:31f). Low tensions and peace are still discursively expressed by current leaders (Henrikson 2020:18; Käpylä & Mikkola 2019:153) and after relations elsewhere turned conflictual, confidence-building measures were taken in the Arctic to ensure continuing peaceful cooperation (Käpylä & Mikkola 2019:156).

Lastly, *Arctic diplomacy* is a formative element of Arctic Exceptionalism. To begin with, it consists of a network of institutions and agreements that constitute mechanisms of Arctic governance (Crawford 2021) rather than one comprehensive agreement (Käpylä & Mikkola 2019:155f). This includes Arctic-specific institutions, such as the Arctic Council (Crawford 2021:475), but also relates to international legal mechanisms such as the United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) when it comes to establishing legitimacy as Arctic actors and emphasizing sovereignty over the Arctic (Dodds 2020:263; Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:54). Additionally, non-state actors and Indigenous peoples are given space in Arctic politics (Crawford 2021:483; Exner-Pirot 2020b:315; Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:57), including the official representation of Arctic Indigenous peoples in the Arctic Council, which is unique internationally (Exner-Pirot 2013:125).

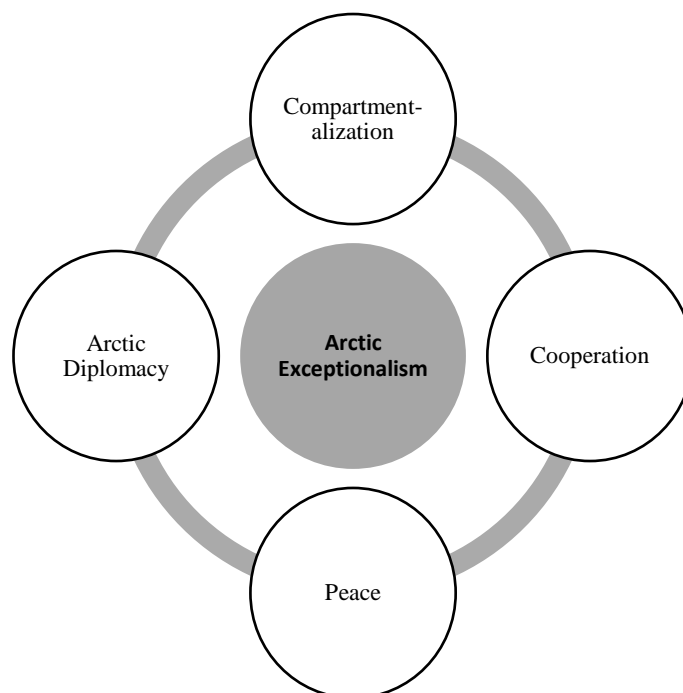


Figure 5: Elements of Arctic Exceptionalism
Own figure

These four themes, depicted in figure 5, summarize four elements of Arctic inter-state relations that were constituted by deliberate choices made by Arctic states. Arctic Exceptionalism is then a selective (Gjørsv & Hodgson 2019:2) discursive (Pic & Lasserre 2019:10) construction that mainly relates to compartmentalization and the exclusion of security matters from the political agenda to upkeep cooperative relations.

4.2.2 The Desecuritization of Inter-State Relations in the Arctic

The shift from military tension during the Cold War to peaceful cooperation can be reflected on using desecuritization. Desecuritization can take three forms. The first form, the avoidance of securitization in the first place, was not an option, as the military sector had become securitized throughout the Cold War. The remaining options are then to either manage the securitized state and avoid further escalation, or to transform the threat and return to normalized politics.

As mentioned above, Gorbachev's Murmansk speech (1987) served as the starting point for a shift in Arctic relations. To stop a form of militarization that, as he put it, was "assuming threatening dimensions" (ibid:4), he called for the Arctic to become a "zone of peace" (ibid:4). To achieve this, he put forth a total of six prepositions (ibid:4ff): firstly, the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the European Arctic, secondly, the restriction of naval activity in the

European Arctic, thirdly, cooperation in Arctic resource development, fourthly, scientific cooperation in the Arctic, fifthly, cooperation on environmental issues in the Arctic, and lastly, the use of the potential of the Northern Sea Route.

These six propositions cover an array of sectors. On the one hand, they include references to the economic, environmental, and societal sectors, in which he suggests cooperative measures that would be of benefit to the parties involved. On the other hand, there is a direct reference to the military sector through the proposal to refrain from nuclear activity and restrict naval activity in the Arctic. This forms a direct attempt to relieve military tensions. Åtland (2008:305ff) finds that the push for cooperation in the non-military sectors constitutes a form of transformation, as it suggests the return to normalized politics within which cooperation is possible. The military sector, though, is not transformed, as the nuclear threat remained. Instead, the suggestion to refrain from nuclear activity in the Arctic is seen as a form of management of the securitized issue (ibid:306).

Having said this, it is important to point out that, while the normalization of environmental and societal issues was subsequently institutionalized within the Arctic Council (Arctic Council 1996:1), military issues were silenced from the agenda by stating that “[t]he Arctic Council should not deal with matters related to military security.” (Arctic Council 1996:2) in its founding document. Instead of managing the military sector, it was silenced. This can be seen as a parallel to the compartmentalization of Arctic relations, which involves the avoidance of the topic of military security.

4.2.3 Arctic Exceptionalism and the Routinization of Relations

As defined prior, a social arrangement contains a structured pattern of transactions between actors. It comprises the environment for interaction and constitutes the actors within. Having identified the key elements of Arctic Exceptionalism, it is possible to look at this in the context of the Arctic. Firstly, the state actors that have been involved the elements that constitute Arctic exceptionalism are the eight Arctic states. Secondly, it is possible to recognize a structured pattern within these four elements: the setting of the interactions within a network of institutions and regulations with a selection of acceptable topics and cooperative activities. Lastly, it contains a large aspect of discursive formation, seen in, for example, the discursive commitment to an Arctic with low tensions, but also institutionalized practices, such as the silencing of security issues.

The components that are considered to make Arctic relations exceptional have developed since the end of the Cold War and are based on the subsequent desecuritization that opened the opportunity for a restructuring of Arctic relations, as expressed Mikhail Gorbachev's Murmansk speech (Greaves 2019:2). Starting with environmental issues, first institutionalized in the AEPS in 1991 and then further structured and extended by aspects of sustainable development through the creation of the Arctic Council (Käpylä & Mikkola 2019:154), the latter also brought an important practice: the exclusion of security matters, which was even written into a footnote in the Ottawa Declaration that established the Arctic Council (Arctic Council 1996). These measures, in the end, led to stability in inter-state relations in the Arctic (Heininen 2011:33).

The routines that have developed since the Cold War and that constitute the social arrangement between Arctic states are therefore the compartmentalization of Arctic politics, a focus on areas of cooperation, conscious efforts to keep tensions low, and a patchwork of diplomatic and legal institutions that provide Arctic states with the mechanisms to protect their interests. Framing the Arctic as exceptional through compartmentalization creates the framework for predictability that is needed for cooperative relations in the Arctic to be upheld. Applying the relational ontological security framework then provides an understanding of what disruptions of these components mean.

4.2.4 Summary

The concept of Arctic exceptionalism builds on four themes: the compartmentalization of Arctic relations, cooperation, peace, and Arctic diplomacy. By separating the Arctic from global geopolitical interests and underscoring the role of international law in inter-state relations, the Arctic has become characterized by cooperation and peace. This builds on the desecuritization of Arctic relations at the end of the Cold War, when the economic, societal, and environmental sectors were normalized, while military issues were first managed and then silenced. The compartmentalization of Arctic politics and the explicit exclusion of security matters with a basis in normalized politics form the routines of the social arrangement within which Arctic states interact, resulting in stability and predictability within inter-state relations in the Arctic.

4.3 Climate Change Discourse in the EU's Arctic Policy

Climate change is an issue that runs through all four Communications about EU policy towards the Arctic that have been published. The scope of its inclusion ranges from the description of climate change impacts in the Arctic to its connection with related Arctic issues, such as maritime environmental protection and sustainable development, to global efforts against climate change, and repeatedly touches upon the key terms of cooperation, research, and finances – additionally, it is repeatedly touched upon from a security perspective. The inclusion of climate change in the EU's Arctic policy opens the possibility to analyze its portrayal and how it is spoken of.

As previously outlined, discourse is constitutive of its object. This means that how is portrayed establishes knowledge about it and shapes the understanding that is carried, contributing to its meaning. Therefore, the employment of climate change discourse in the EU's Arctic policy is not neutral but instead adds meaning to how climate change is understood, due to its dual scope both in the Arctic and on a global level. This section of the analysis centers around this issue and aims to establish how climate change is spoken of in the EU's Arctic policy and how these discourse strategies construct climate change as a security threat. To illustrate this construction, the section starts with a presentation of the five identified discourse strategies. Afterward, the securitizing move that is undertaken by the EU is discussed.

4.3.1 Discursive Strategies in the EU's Arctic Policy

Within the EU's Arctic policy, it is possible to identify five discursive strategies that drive its climate change discourse. The first strategy is the depiction of a vulnerable Arctic that is threatened by climate change. The second strategy is the establishment of EU authority regarding climate change in the Arctic by linking the EU to the Arctic and emphasizing EU leadership in global efforts against climate change. Thereover, the third strategy links the Arctic to global climate change efforts by establishing global responsibility. The fourth strategy frames the Arctic as exceptional because of the climate developments taking place there. Finally, the fifth strategy eliminates discursive inconsistencies by pushing for a moratorium on hydrocarbon extraction.

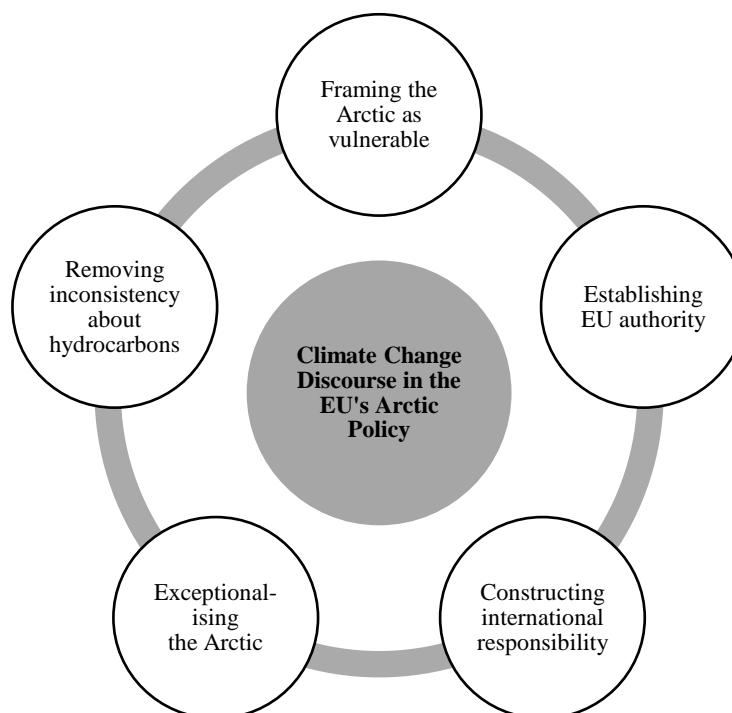


Figure 6: Discursive Strategies in the EU's Climate Change Discourse
Own figure

As depicted in figure 6 above, these discursive are interconnected and interdependent. The separation applied throughout the following explanations is for analytical purposes to ensure clarity. Each of the five strategies will be presented in the subsequent sections and illustrated with examples.

4.3.1.1 Discursive Strategy 1: Framing the Arctic as Vulnerable

Throughout the EU's Arctic policy, the depiction of the Arctic itself relates to creating a feeling of protectiveness. Discursively, the Arctic is portrayed as delicate and vulnerable by underscoring its uniqueness. It is referred to as "among the last pristine areas on earth" (Council of the European Union 2008:2), as an untouched area that stands on the verge of change, as the following three examples show:

"We have a unique chance here: an almost virgin territory, full of opportunities and possibilities. There is no denying that, faced with similar choices in the past, we have behaved irresponsibly. We have looked at our immediate gain and assumed that whatever wounds we inflicted to it, the Earth would heal itself. The Arctic is our chance not to commit the same atrocities, the same mistakes." (Damanaki 2011d:5, emphasis added)

"Indeed, the unequalled beauty, fragility and potential of this particular ocean should induce at least some humility in our analysis and decisions." (Damanaki 2010b:4, emphasis added)

“The changing Arctic environment is now the subject of a heated debate at global level: **should we take this opportunity to enable the Arctic’s economic development and exploit its riches**, as the world’s resources grow scarce; **or should we preserve the Arctic as one of the last pristine and untouched areas of the world?** Or can we do both?” (Damanaki 2013:2, emphasis added)

The framing of the Arctic as an untouched region that is endangered by increasing human activity and climate change creates an image of the Arctic as vulnerable and in need of protection. This is supported by the repeated explicit reference to the Arctic as vulnerable and fragile, whether this wording refers to “fragile ecosystems” (Damanaki 2010a:3), the Arctic’s “fragile environment” (European Commission 2008a:12, 2012b:2; European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016:3, 9), to the Arctic as a “fragile and unique sea basin” (Damanaki 2011c:2, 2011d:3), or to the vulnerability of the Arctic’s indigenous peoples:

“About a third of the 4 million people living in the Arctic are indigenous. They are **particularly vulnerable** to the increasing pressures of climate change and exceptional n.” (European Commission 2008a:4, emphasis added)

The setup of the Arctic as such an easily damageable area then serves as the backdrop against which specific dangers of both climate change and human activity are presented. Not only is the Arctic described to be undergoing “tremendous” (Damanaki 2010b:2) and “rapid” (Vella 2019) changes to its physical environment, but moreover, this change is presented as a threat to Arctic populations:

“The impact of these changes goes far beyond the agony of polar bears, walruses, or other ice-dependent animals. Beyond the loss of habitat and forage bases. **I am talking about changes in the migratory routes of caribou and reindeer, affecting indigenous communities and ecosystems.** I am talking about the fact that permafrost thawing could destabilise 70% of Arctic infrastructure by 2050. **The impacts will manifest in sea level rise, changes in the food supply, reduced carbon sequestration, and extreme weather events...**” (Vella 2019, emphasis added)

Overall, the first discursive strategy consists of a particular presentation of the Arctic, one that is constructed through the reinforcing combination of Arctic vulnerability and the threat of climate change. This articulation ranges from the mention of climate change as a “threat multiplier” in the 2008 Communication (European Commission 2008a:2) to the explicit referral to climate change as “the most comprehensive threat the Arctic is facing” in the 2021 Communication (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:1). Through the particular framing of the Arctic that

is accepted within this discourse strategy, the threat potential of climate change is amplified, which sets the stage for a continuing push towards securitization.

4.3.1.2 Discursive Strategy 2: Establishing EU Authority

As mentioned within [Sections 3.1.1](#) and [4.1.1](#), the acceptance of a securitizing move is contingent on the perceived authority of the securitizing actor. Authority, in this case, is twofold. On the one hand, it is contingent on the EU's competence concerning the threat, on the other hand, it is related to the idea of posing as an example. Both aspects are touched upon as part of a discourse strategy to establish the required authority.

Firstly, the EU frames itself as an Arctic actor. While the EU acknowledges that it has no Arctic coastline (European Commission 2008a:2, 2008c:1, 2012b:1), it simultaneously highlights that three of its member states have Arctic territory and that is closely associated with two more Arctic states – Iceland and Norway – and that it considers the US and Canada as strategic partners (European Commission 2008a:2, 2016b). At the same time, the EU highlights its historical, geographical, economic, and scientific links to the Arctic (Borg 2009a:2; Damanaki 2010a:2; European Commission 2012b:1):

“While the EU has **no direct coastline** with the Arctic Ocean, **it is inextricably linked to the Arctic**, not only from historical, economic and geographical perspectives, but also as an importer of natural resources and through its wider concern and responsibility for the global environment.” (European Commission 2012b:1, emphasis added)

In stark contrast, within the 2021 Communication, no such legitimation of the EU's role in the Arctic is given. Instead, it simply states that “[t]he European Union (EU) is in the Arctic” (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:1).

In addition to the construction of a link between the EU and the Arctic, it is, in several instances, highlighted that some areas of the Arctic are beyond the national jurisdiction of the Arctic states (European Commission 2008a:9, Vella 2015b). This opens a role for the EU in the Arctic and gives the framing of the EU being an Arctic actor further vigor.

Additionally, the EU's Arctic policy sets out to establish the competence of the EU when it comes to actions against climate change. This is achieved in two ways, which are illustrated through the following example:

“But perhaps most importantly **we are world leaders** in the fight against climate change. Not only have **we set ourselves the most ambitious targets**, we have also **done our homework on how to achieve them.**” (Ferrero-Waldner 2009:2, emphasis added)

Firstly, through the explicit reference to EU leadership on a global level through phrasings such as “world leader” (Damanaki 2011a:3; Ferrero-Waldner 2009:2), or similarly, “frontrunner” (Borg, 2009b:3; European Commission 2008c:1), “our global leadership” (European Commission 2021a) and additional variations of word *lead* in other instances. Secondly, through the idea of leading by example and referencing EU activities to mitigate climate change. This encases both examples of EU climate targets, such as targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2012a:4, 2016:7), as well as financial contributions to climate change mitigation (Vella 2015a), in an overall effort to showcase the commitment to efforts against climate change and to show that “[t]he EU is ready to lead by example” (Sinkevičius 2021b:2).

In summary, the second discursive strategy is the construction of the EU’s authority as a securitizing actor by setting itself up as an Arctic actor and as a global leader in efforts against climate change, lending an increased amount of credibility to a move for further securitization of climate change. An overarching illustration of the second discourse strategy is present in the following example:

“Indeed, **the rapidity of change in the Arctic provides a strong rationale for the EU’s commitment to environmental protection and the fight against climate change.** It also calls for increased EU investment in climate change research in the Arctic, as a basis for further global and regional action.” (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2012a:2, emphasis added)

4.3.1.3 Discursive Strategy 3: Constructing International Responsibility for the Arctic

A third discursive strategy employed throughout the European Arctic policy is the construction of climate change in the Arctic as an international responsibility. At the focus of this construction is the argument that the challenges that are present in the Arctic cannot be solely solved by Arctic states (Vella 2017b), as they are international in character (European Commission 2008c:2):

“Challenges like climate change or long-range pollution **cannot be solved by the Arctic States alone.** The undeniable evidence of melting glaciers and rising sea levels **should**

drive the world’s governments to act and combat climate change.” (Vella 2017b, emphasis added)

This line of argumentation was a large part of the 2008 Communication, in which the idea of enhanced governance was built around the globalization of Arctic challenges and the inadequacy of Arctic states to solve this issue on their own (Borg 2009a:3). It emphasizes the international legal framework that can be applied to the Arctic, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):

“The main legal framework and tool for managing the Arctic Ocean and its resources is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS, which **establishes the notion of a “common heritage of mankind”.**” (Borg 2009a:3, emphasis added)

The above-shown extract is of particular interest due to its reference to UNLOS with the notion of a common Arctic, which strongly differs from the way in which Arctic states rely on the mechanism of UNCLOS for solving territorial disputes and ensuring a peaceful demarcation of Arctic territories. This deviation required additional explanation, during which a reversal of this commonality is observable:

“I was asked what ‘enhanced governance’ means in practice. In hindsight we might have used a different wording. However I made it absolutely clear that **we have no desire to impose any new structures. The EU fully upholds the existing law of the sea and respects the sovereign rights of the Arctic states.**” (Damanaki 2011c:2f, emphasis added)

Instead, the alignment of EU actions in the Arctic with its objectives and the activities of others is put into focus and enhanced governance is narrowed to cooperation (Damanaki 2011c:4), stressing the maintenance of state sovereignty:

“In my opinion, however, whether or not the Arctic is to be exploited economically for these purposes **is not up to us** – whether here, in London or in Beijing. In my view, **the first say goes to the countries directly surrounding the Arctic** and to the people inhabiting this region.” (Damanaki 2012:3, emphasis added)

Despite this backtrack, climate change continued to be framed as a global matter of responsibility, highlighting that “actions and decisions taken elsewhere in the world have a direct impact on the Arctic” (European Commission 2017a), making the Arctic relevant for everyone and requiring cooperation to solve pressing issues. International frameworks that the EU has advocated for include the International Polar Code (Vella 2017b), international environmental standards (European Commission 2008a:7), and, most recently, a moratorium on hydrocarbon extraction in Arctic areas (European Commission 2021b).

Overall, despite the retraction of a push towards a common Arctic in the form of enhanced governance, the EU continued claiming global responsibility for climate change in the Arctic, highlighting the necessity of common actions and cooperation, and pulling climate change in the Arctic into the international sphere.

4.3.1.4 Discursive Strategy 4: Exceptionalising the Arctic

The fourth discursive strategy that is employed with the EU's Arctic policy is a form of exceptionalism regarding the climate developments in the Arctic. This strategy is evident in a triad of actions. Firstly, there is a strong emphasis on the speed and force of climate change developments in the Arctic in comparison to the rest of the planet:

“If **the rest of the world** is hot from climate change, **the Arctic region** is burning.” (Damanaki 2011a:2, emphasis added)

“The Arctic is being hit by a number of external factors. Greenhouse gas emissions in particular. **Already today, the Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the world.**” (European Commission 2016d, emphasis added)

This device of comparison helps to create a sense of urgency and places the Arctic in an elevated place as something that, on the one hand, is currently more in danger and requires actions to be taken to prevent further deterioration, and, on the other hand, can serve as an example that the impact of climate change can severely alter the reality of a place. Consistent with this second aspect, the Arctic is used as a device to portray the dangers of climate change on the global scale. The loss of sea ice and forest fires in the Arctic are, in several instances, touched on as part of publications and speeches that are not directly in an Arctic context. Such an instance was, for example, a speech by then-Commissioner for the Environment Stavros Dimas as part of a seminar on climate change in 2009:

“From **record losses of summer sea ice in the Arctic** to the record heat wave and deadly bushfires that ravaged southern Australia in February, we are already seeing a growing catalogue of climate impacts.” (Dimas 2009a:2, emphasis added)

Secondly, the impact of climate change in the Arctic is also used as a reference as part of background information on EU climate policy (Dombrovskis 2018; European Commission 2009a:7, 2013a:3), or speeches on the context of ocean governance (Vella 2015c, 2015d). The Arctic is presented as an exceptional example because the impacts of climate can already be observed (Dimas 2009b:3). This is another phrasing that pulls the Arctic into the center of global efforts against climate change.

Thirdly, the EU's Arctic policy does not stop at presenting climate change as a threat to the Arctic. Instead, the changing Arctic is additionally presented as a threat on the global level due to its reinforcing relationship with climate change:

“The changing Arctic environment is not only an early indicator of global warming; **it also feeds back and amplifies global climate change**, affecting Europe's climate as well as other regions.” (Geoghegan-Quinn 2014a:2, emphasis added)

“In fact we know – from a programme on climate change and marine ecosystems research that the EU funded – that **the melting ice in the Arctic has an impact on ocean circulation and migration of sea-life that extends down to the Mediterranean.**” (Damanakis 2011d:3, emphasis added)

This linkage facilitates the framing of climate change in the Arctic as a global responsibility, as discussed in strategy three, as it means that not only is climate change happening there and affects states that encompass Arctic territory, but it also furthermore affects states with no territorial link to the Arctic. Such an emphasis highlights the global need for action:

“[...] the environment crisis and climate change show us that **what happens in the Arctic does not stay in the Arctic.** Similarly, global actions and demand patterns do not stay out of the region.” (Sinkevičius 2021b:2, emphasis added)

To sum up, the fourth discursive strategy consists of an exceptionalisation of the Arctic due to, firstly, the urgency for action as a result of the stronger and faster effect of climate change there; secondly, the exemplification of already observable impacts of climate change in the Arctic as part of the global climate change discourse; and thirdly, the framing of climate change in the Arctic as a global threat due to its reinforcement of global climate change developments. This discourse of exceptionalism creates urgency, and it provides duality regarding the object that is threatened by climate change in the Arctic– no longer is only the Arctic itself endangered but also the rest of the planet.

4.3.1.5 Discursive Strategy 5: Removing Inconsistency About Hydrocarbons

Up until the 2021 Communication, the EU has followed a doubled-edged strategy toward the Arctic. On the one hand, as outlined above, a strong emphasis was put on the impacts of climate change in the Arctic and its amplifying effect on the global level. On the other hand, aware of the potential of Arctic resources, the EU pushed for sustainable resource extraction in spirit of sustainable development:

“The Communication gives clear priority to the protection of the Arctic environment. However, it **exceptiona that exploitation of Arctic hydrocarbon resources and the opening of new navigation routes can be of benefit, provided it is done in full respect of the highest environmental standards.**” (European Commission 2008c:2, emphasis added)

Disregarding the idea that underlies the Arctic paradox and the implication of hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic for global efforts against climate change, the EU focused on sustainable development and its economic benefits. Stressing the need to keep a balance between resource extraction and environmental protection (Council of the European Union 2008:3), the main criteria was that

“[...] the Arctic’s natural resources both on land, at sea, and at or below the sea-bed **are xceptio in a sustainable manner** that does not compromise the Arctic environment and benefits local communities.” (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2012a:9, emphasis added)

Therein, the EU’s Arctic policy contained a contradiction to the securitization of climate change, as this meant the continuation of existent approaches and countered the credibility of the EU’s authority in that regard. This approach was still pursued after the 2016 Communication when the Paris Agreement had already been negotiated. Only after the introduction of the European Green Deal and the subsequent re-assessment of the Arctic policy did this change.

The 2021 Communication posed a turnaround in the sense that the EU express the willingness to push for a moratorium on the extraction of carbohydrates in the Arctic:

“Building on the partial moratoriums on hydrocarbons exploration in the Arctic, the EU is committed to **ensuring that oil, coal and gas stay in the ground, including in Arctic regions.**” (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:10, emphasis added)

This initiative includes both the disallowance of resource extraction as well as the refusal to buy these hydrocarbons. It is based on the general realization of the significant impact of hydrocarbons on climate change and that the establishment of new sites for the extraction of hydrocarbons is in the way of progress on climate objectives (European Commission 2021b).

In summary, this can be understood as a move away from a counter-discourse that was present within the EU’s Arctic policy, and a push for new measures to reach set climate change objectives.

4.3.2 Climate Change Discourse as a Securitizing Move

The climate change discourse within the EU's Arctic policy displays a construction of the knowledge/power relation that strongly concerns climate change as a security issue. Throughout all five discursive strategies, the construction of climate change as a security threat can be observed. Yet this construction merits a closer look regarding the components of securitization theory, as the discourse sets them up in diverse ways. Additionally, due to its global focus, it can also be discussed as a macrosecuritization.

4.3.2.1 Components of Securitization

The securitizing actor is the European Commission, as representative of the EU. The official foundation of the EU's Arctic policy within the four Communications from the European Commission is a direct expression thereof. Additionally, the policy is communicated externally through speeches by Commissioners. This, therefore, includes different layers of agency, but as speeches from individual Commissioners do not deviate from the discourse that is established in the Communications from the European Commission and instead echo the official strategy, they can be seen to speak on behalf of the European Commission. Discursive strategy 1 aims to establish the authority that is expected from a securitizing actor regarding competence and ability to act against the threat that is put forth.

The speech act that constitutes the securitizing move contains two elements, the existential threat, and the referent object. Throughout the EU's Arctic policy, security language is employed repeatedly when it comes to climate change. This ranges from the presentation of climate change as a "threat multiplier" (European Commission 2008a:2), as a threat to the Arctic (Damanaki 2011a:4; European Commission 2009c; European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016:5, 2021:1; Vella 2015a) and the global environment (European Commission 2013f; Vella 2015d), as an issue that needs to be "tackled" (Dimas 2009a:3; European Commission 2016b; Vella 2015a), as a "crisis" (Sinkevičius 2021b:2), and efforts against climate change are portrayed as a fight or combat (European Commission 2017c; Vella 2017b). Climate change is depicted as existentially threatening Indigenous peoples in the Arctic:

"Modernisation and exceptionalism don't stop below the Arctic Circle. Nor do environmental challenges like climate change, long-range pollution, and marine litter. They are not only putting Arctic ecosystems under stress. **They are eroding the basis**

to preserve your livelihoods and traditions for the future generations.” (Vella 2017e, emphasis added)

Additionally, the impact of climate change is repeatedly mentioned, both in the Arctic and globally, and related to disaster (European Commission 2009a:5, 2009b:1), going beyond environmental impacts to an emphasis on societal aspects:

“The potential consequences of climate change for humanity are very worrying: **waves of migrants** will flee lands that will become **uninhabitable**; ever more **frequent natural disasters** will cause great **damage to our economies.**” (Spidla 2009:2, emphasis added)

Lastly, urgency is created through both mentions of predicted timelines for changes in the Arctic and figurative language. In addition to simply pointing out the need for urgent (European Commission 2016d) action, examples for the latter include:

“This is the **make or break decade** in the fight against the climate and biodiversity crises. **Our generation has the unique and only opportunity** to change the world and the Arctic is at the centre of this change.” (Sinkevičius 2021a;1, emphasis added)

“These two examples illustrate how **time is going faster** in this fragile and unique sea basin.” (Damanaki 2011c:2, emphasis added)

Discursive strategies 1 and 4 also contribute to the establishment of climate change as a threat, by contrasting the delicate Arctic to the implications of climate change and by highlighting its higher speed in the Arctic to create a sense of urgency for global action.

The second component of the speech act is the referent object. At first glance, this seems to be the Arctic, as the investigation within this thesis centers around the climate change discourse in the EU’s Arctic policy. But a closer examination of this discourse casts doubts on this: throughout discursive strategies 3 and 4, constant connections to climate change on the global level are made and overarching calls for action are related to the international level:

“Let us be bold and protect this precious region **in the interest of our planet as a whole.**” (Borg 2009a:5, emphasis added)

Through the establishment of global responsibility for the Arctic and the depiction of climate change in the Arctic as only being solvable through international efforts, which is both part of discursive strategy 3, and through the triad of exceptionalism present in strategy 4, climate change in the Arctic is lifted into the global sphere. There, it serves as an example of the dangers of climate change and as an additional threat through its reinforcement of global climate change dynamics. This shifts the referent object from containing solely the Arctic onto

the whole planet – the Arctic is referred to as a “test bench” (Damanaki 2011a) in efforts against climate change.

Similarly, a differentiation of the audience of the securitizing move must be made. On the one hand, this includes the aspect of internal and external, with internal referring to EU member states and external referring to the international community. Within the international community, there must be a separation between the Arctic states and the remaining international community. Calls for measures within the Arctic, such as the proposal for a moratorium on hydrocarbon extraction, can only be achieved if the Arctic states, who have national jurisdiction over parts of the Arctic, accept the securitizing move. Similarly, global measures to limit outside impact that contributes to climate change in the Arctic, and climate change on the global scale, can only be successful through cooperation based on acceptance by the international community.

From speech act, actor, and threat, it is possible to derive the characteristics that form the facilitating conditions. Firstly, the securitizing move benefits from using security language, which applies to the climate change discourse in the EU’s Arctic policy, as depicted above. Secondly, the authority of the actor and his relations with the audience can also beneficially influence the success of the securitizing move. But while the EU establishes its competence and links itself to the Arctic, the acceptance is doubtful, since the international community – and even the Arctic states themselves – possess a variety of interests that have in the past hindered the successful establishment of exceptional measures. Lastly, success also depends on the type of threat. Climate change can be exemplified using specific examples, such as the melting ice sheets or the forest fires in the Arctic, a characteristic that can facilitate securitization and is employed throughout the EU’s climate change discourse in the Arctic policy.

4.3.2.2 Analytical Levels of Macrosecuritization

The securitization of climate change in this instance can be looked upon as a macrosecuritization. On the level of scope, climate change is presented as a threat affecting the whole planet, with climate change in the Arctic reinforcing global climate change. On the level of comprehensiveness, the EU’s Arctic policy presents climate change as a comprehensive threat that goes beyond the environmental sector and covers aspects of societal and economic security. Through reference to discourses about climate change leading to rising geopolitical tensions in the Arctic it is linked to military security:

“Arctic security encompasses **environmental, economic and political-military elements**, which cannot be seen in isolation from each other. Climate change and melting ice are leading to **greater geopolitical interest** with a high potential for increased strategic competition” (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:3, emphasis added)

Lastly, the level of successful persuasion of the audience is, as discussed above, the largest weakness of the securitizing move. On the one hand, considering the Arctic, moves that had the potential to interfere with national jurisdiction had to be backtracked, as seen in discursive strategy 3. As the EU has no coastline, the push for a moratorium on hydrocarbon extraction is reliant on the Arctic states, who have so far considered climate change within normal politics. On the other hand, the international community consists of a diverse set of actors that need to accept the move, further impeding success.

4.3.3 Summary

Climate change discourse within the EU’s Arctic policy consists of five discursive strategies. Firstly, the Arctic is framed as vulnerable, secondly, EU authority is established, thirdly, climate change in the Arctic is constructed as an area of international responsibility, fourthly, the Arctic is presented as exceptional due to the developments of its climate, and lastly, a move away from the sustainable use of hydrocarbons to a push for an extraction moratorium takes place.

Each of these five strategies contributes to the presentation of climate change in the Arctic as a security threat. This securitizing move links climate change in the Arctic to global developments, shifting the referent object and expanding the audience to the international community, thereby effectively pulling the Arctic into the global sphere.

4.4 Impact of the EU’s Climate Change Discourse

There is an interesting dichotomy between the concept of Arctic exceptionalism and the EU’s climate change discourse: While the concept of Arctic exceptionalism has its foundation in the desecuritization and normalization of inter-state relations in the Arctic, the EU’s climate change discourse centers around the construction of climate change as a security threat. This contrast is examined closer in this section. This, in part, follows Buzan & Wæver (2009:266), who argue that a macrosecuritization should not only be examined regarding the components of securitization, i.e., securitizing actor, audience, and speech act, but also regarding the synergies it may have with counter- and co-securitizations. While the concept of Arctic

exceptionalism does not pose as either but instead refers to the desecuritized state of relations in the Arctic, there is a connection between the two through the treatment of the Arctic as an exceptional space that still makes an examination worthwhile.

The structure of the remainder of this section is twofold. First, the aforementioned comparison is conducted, afterwards, the implication of the deviations for inter-state relations in the Arctic is discussed by reverting to ontological security.

4.4.1 Deviations in the Depiction of the Arctic as Exceptional

The first theme of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is an emphasis on *Peace* in the Arctic. Strongly related to the desecuritization and normalization of the non-military sectors and the silencing of security issues, the Arctic is characterized as a peaceful area with low tensions. Importantly, the EU's Arctic policy contains elements that echo this description, referring to the Arctic as "a region of low tension" (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:3) and as a "zone of peace" (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2016:4), a status that has been conserved despite growing geopolitical interests (European Commission 2020). Yet the continuous reference to climate change in the Arctic within efforts to securitize climate change and the exceptionalisation of the Arctic due to its connection with climate change stands in contrast with the silencing of security matters and the handling of environmental, societal, and economic issues within normalized political processes.

The second theme was an emphasis on *Cooperation* between the Arctic states, based on common environmental and societal challenges. These are dealt with within the field of low politics (Exner-Pirot & Murray 2017:53), where cooperation is beneficial for the Arctic states. The importance of cooperation is similarly highlighted in the EU's climate change discourse, but it puts a different focus. On the one hand, cooperation is seen as a necessity to combat climate change (Damanaki 2010a:3; Sinkevičius 2021b:3). On the other hand, due to the exception of climate change in the Arctic to global climate change and the creation of responsibility on the international level, the EU's climate change discourse also emphasizes the importance of international cooperation when it comes to measures against climate change (Vella 2017b). This is a shift in the scope that is under consideration.

The third theme is *Arctic Diplomacy*, which refers to a web of governance institutions and agreements that serves as the framework for inter-state relations in the Arctic (Crawford

2021), with an emphasis on sovereignty. The EU's Arctic policy contains reassurances of its respect for the sovereignty of the Arctic states (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:1; Damanaki 2012:3) and simultaneously highlights the importance of international frameworks for the protection of the Arctic environment and efforts against climate change. As outlined above, the EU's Arctic policy also contains references to UNCLOS, which serves to add legitimacy to attempts to globalize responsibility rather than as a guideline for the peaceful solution of territorial disputes. Additionally, the EU has in the past attempted to push for "enhanced governance" (European Commission 2008a:9f) in the Arctic, a move, on which it then retracted and rephrased to put cooperation back into focus (Damanaki 2011c:2f).

The last theme centers around the *Compartmentalization of Arctic Politics*, as part of which the Arctic is detached from geopolitical developments on the global level and security matters are silenced. Here, the largest divergence can be observed, as the EU's climate change discourse pulls the Arctic into the global sphere and tries to utilize it to construct climate change as a security issue, both by exemplifying the faster impact of climate change in the Arctic (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2021:1) and by highlighting the risk that developments in the Arctic pose on a global level (Sinkevičius 2021b:2f).

In summary, the core of the exceptionalisation of the Arctic that takes place within the EU's Arctic policy is an emphasis on the impact of climate change in the Arctic as part of a securitizing move on the global scale, which breaks with the two fundamental points of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism – the compartmentalization of Arctic politics, and the silencing of security matters.

4.4.2 An Ontological Security Perspective on the EU's Climate Change Impact

The move within the EU's climate change discourse to put climate change onto the global security agenda and push for exceptional measures, such as a moratorium on hydrocarbon extraction, deviates fundamentally from the ideas that the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is composed of. This impacts Arctic inter-state relations in two ways, by constructing a physical threat and by increasing relational insecurity.

Firstly, the macrosecuritization of climate change can be considered what Buzan & Wæver (2009:261) call *a physical threat universalism* that relates to the construction of a

physical threat as a global danger. While this move has the “physical fate of humankind” (ibid:261) as the referent object, it utilizes the physical changes that the Arctic experiences due to climate change to exemplify the dangers that arise. The securitizing move therefore inevitably also contains a securitization of climate change in the Arctic, depicting a physical threat, which can be observed. The securitization of a threat depends on its acceptance by the audience, which is required to establish exceptional measures. If the Arctic states accept the necessity of exceptional measures to combat climate change, the issue is moved from the stage of politicization and its handling within normal politics to an exceptional space. This equals a move away from the state of desecuritization that is the foundation for the concept of Arctic exceptionalism. Looking at the EU’s Arctic policy, the Arctic states have rejected such an attempt as part of the push for “enhanced governance” (Damanaki 2011c:2f; European Commission 2008a:9f).

Secondly, the EU’s securitizing move serves as a source of insecurity even if the securitization of climate change is not accepted, as it creates unpredictability by deviating from the rules that are established within the social arrangement in the Arctic. The integration of both the EU’s Climate Change Discourse and the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism into the relational ontological security framework is depicted in figure 7.

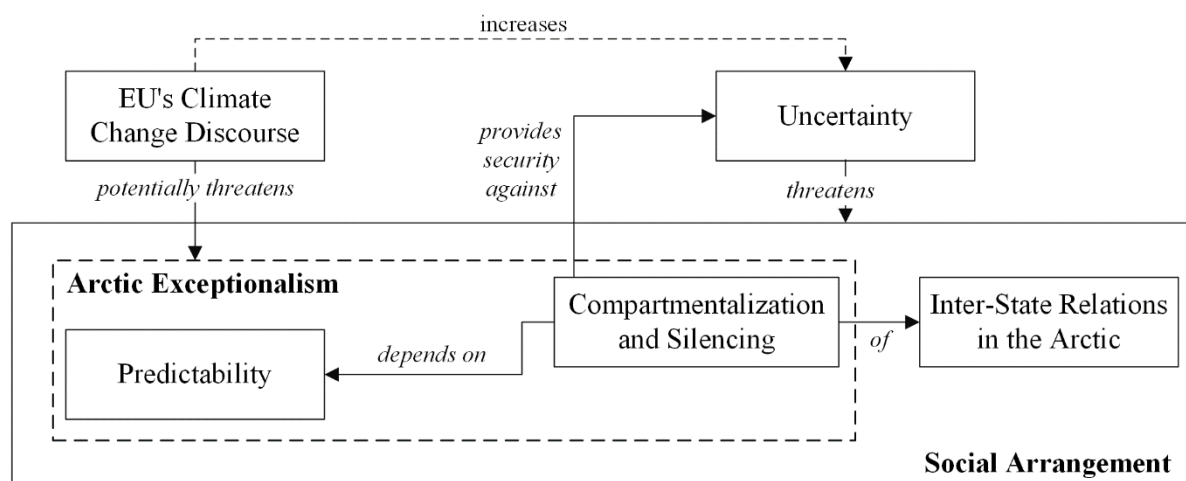


Figure 7: Integration of the EU’s Climate Change Discourse and Arctic Exceptionalism into the Ontological Security Framework
Own figure, based on Figure 4

Arctic Exceptionalism as a trust system traces back to the cross-sectoral desecuritization of Arctic relations that became institutionalized in the Arctic Council. The resulting silencing of security matters and compartmentalization of Arctic politics stand as routines within the

social arrangement that result in stability and predictability and enable peaceful cooperation. The EU's climate change discourse has the potential to threaten Arctic Exceptionalism, which is built upon these routines, and creates unpredictability. In reaction to this, Arctic states have three options on how to react, namely *refereeing*, *performative deference*, and *obstructive resistance*. The 2008 initiative to enhance governance in the Arctic was resisted and the EU referred to the upkeep of state sovereignty (Damanaki 2011c:2f; European Commission 2008a:9f), thus preserving social arrangement and the elements of Arctic exceptionalism.

4.4.3 Summary

The depiction of the Arctic as exceptional within the EU's climate change discourse relates to the construction of climate change as a threat, based on the already visible impact of climate change in the Arctic, and the reciprocal global impact of climate developments in the Arctic, thereby pulling the Arctic into the global scale. This is a deviation from the two key points of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism, as it breaks the compartmentalization of Arctic politics and talks about security matters by putting climate change into the security agenda.

The EU's climate change discourse affects inter-state relations as depicted by the concept of Arctic exceptionalism in two ways. On the one hand, the securitization move aims to establish a physical threat globally and, in doing so, also in the Arctic. On the other hand, it increases insecurity by breaking the routines on which the inter-state relations are built, thereby endangering the social arrangement. In the past, Arctic states have rejected calls for exceptional measures from the EU, thereby preserving the social arrangement and keeping climate change politics within the area of normal politics.

5 Discussion

The analysis examined the depiction of climate change within the EU's Arctic policy, finding that the EU employs security language throughout all its discursive strategies, resulting in a securitizing move. Yet the referent object of this move is not the Arctic itself. Instead, the discourse is employed on a global scale, aiming at constructing climate change as a security threat on the global level. In doing so, the EU's Arctic policy deviates in two key points from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism and does thus not only attempt to construct a physical threat but also increases relational insecurity within inter-state relations in the Arctic.

Within the climate change discourse in its Arctic policy, the EU pulls the Arctic into the global sphere in order to reinforce the depiction of climate change as a threat. That is especially evident in discursive strategy 4 and the EU's depiction of the Arctic as exceptional. Firstly, the Arctic is used as a means to create urgency, as it is depicted as an area that is already severely affected by climate change and thus, immediate action is required. Secondly, the observable impacts of climate change are used to visualize its dangers, thereby making climate change as a threat less abstract and better graspable. And thirdly, climate change in the Arctic is presented as a threat, due to its depiction as an amplifier of global climate change effects. Combined, this displays a strategy within which the Arctic is exceptionalised and linked to the global as a means to achieve a certain outcome at the global level – the acceptance by the global audience and the establishment of global emergency measures. But while this move is aimed at a global level, it naturally also involves the Arctic states. They are also an audience to the securitizing move and emergency measures in the Arctic can only be established if the Arctic states are convinced.

The employment of the Arctic as a means to advance the securitization of climate change on a global scale points toward a key aspect in Arctic relations: The Arctic is, what outsiders make it to be. The Arctic as an area is comprised of parts of the territory of eight different states, whose decision-makers reside outside the Arctic. The concept of Arctic exceptionalism displays a similar construction of the Arctic from the outside as the EU's climate change discourse does and centers around the cooperative relationship between the Arctic states in comparison with their relationship outside the Arctic. Moreover, a key aspect of critiques of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is that it is a narrow view of inter-state security and does not account for other kinds of threats that affect local people directly. Instead, as already mentioned when conceptualizing Arctic exceptionalism, it is a selective discourse about characteristics of the Arctic that enable cooperation on the international level.

The EU employing an exceptionalisation of the Arctic as part of its efforts for the securitization of climate change differs from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism. Hence, the construction of the Arctic by outsiders depends on their understanding of the Arctic, and, more importantly, on whether a certain depiction is beneficial. For Arctic states, the compartmentalization of Arctic politics and the depiction of the Arctic as peaceful is essential to counter societal and environmental challenges and pursue economic opportunities. For the EU, the depiction of the Arctic as severely affected by climate change is beneficial, as it serves to advance its aim for action against climate change on a global scale.

This shows how differences in the way that the Arctic is constructed affect inter-state relations in the Arctic. There are direct discursive effects: firstly, in the case of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism, the upkeep of desecuritized relations, secondly, in the case of the EU's climate change discourse, the reinforcement of climate change as a threat. Additionally, it serves to increase insecurity in interstate relations. For the Arctic states, this takes place on two levels. On the one hand, through the construction of a potential threat, which is contingent on them accepting the securitizing move. On the other hand, the securitizing move is also aimed at a global audience in the global sphere, where the Arctic states have different amounts of influence. Even if the securitizing move is rejected on a global level, the transfer of the Arctic to the global level increases insecurity.

Additionally, the EU's climate change discourse poses a potential disruptor of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism by breaking the routines that have been previously established. Whether this potential for disruption is fulfilled, depends on two aspects. For one thing, it depends on the acceptance of the securitizing move by the Arctic states, whereby climate change mitigation is elevated from normal politics to a securitized state requiring emergency measures, thereby ending the desecuritized state of Arctic relations. On the other hand, it depends on the type of trust system that has developed through Arctic exceptionalism, as flexible systems can manage disruptions and adjust or adapt, whereas rigid systems lack the actual trust and consist of an emphasis on routines. Looking at the concept of Arctic exceptionalism, the silencing of military security issues as a way of desecuritization springs to mind, as it lacked actual transformation of the threat. With avoidance at its foundation, the likelihood is that the trust system between Arctic states is frail and cracks under disruption.

The question that remains is then, whether Arctic states will accept the securitizing move. In its latest Arctic policy document, the EU launches the idea of a moratorium on

hydrocarbon extraction in the Arctic. Yet, resource extraction is an important part of the Arctic strategies of several of the Arctic states, in particular Norway and Russia. Therefore, their willingness to accept such a move remains to be seen.

6 Conclusion

The Arctic has long been depicted as exceptional due to the peaceful cooperation between Arctic states. This understanding of exceptionalism, referred to as the concept of Arctic exceptionalism, is challenged by increasing international interest in the Arctic, as part of which the Arctic is depicted in competing ways. One example of a differing depiction of the Arctic as exceptional is the EU throughout its Arctic policy. In 2021, the European Commission revised this policy after the adoption of the European Green Deal, resulting in the description of climate change as a core threat toward the Arctic.

The present research project set out to examine the climate change discourse within the EU's Arctic policy in comparison with the underlying themes of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism to identify observable deviations in the depiction of the Arctic as exceptional. This served the subsequent exploration of how these deviations affect established routines in Arctic politics. Before the results of this examination can be elaborated on, the two components of the comparison needed to be defined.

Firstly, the concept of Arctic exceptionalism can best be summarized as a selective discursive construction that builds on desecuritizing efforts that were carried out after the Cold War. Dominant themes within the concept are the compartmentalization of Arctic politics, a focus on institutionalized cooperation on environmental and social aspects, an emphasis on peaceful relations with low tensions, and a network of diplomatic instruments that form Arctic governance. At the heart of this concept lie two routines: the detachment of the Arctic from global developments and the silencing of security matters.

Secondly, the EU's climate change discourse in its Arctic policy is defined by five discursive strategies. The Arctic is presented as vulnerable to climate change, the EU's authority in climate matters is established, global responsibility for climate change in the Arctic is constructed, the Arctic is exceptionalised, and inconsistencies in threat construction are abolished. Exceptionalising the Arctic through the focus on its vulnerability and the emphasis on the faster developments of climate change in the Arctic and on the impact thereof on a global level constitutes a securitizing move. Within this move, the EU constructs climate change as a threat to humankind to a global audience and uses the Arctic as a means to push for exceptional measures on a global level.

Having established these two components enables their comparison and thereby the answer to the research question that this thesis focuses on:

How does the construction of the Arctic as exceptional in the EU's climate change discourse contrast with the concept of Arctic Exceptionalism and affect established routines therein?

The exceptionalisation of the Arctic within the EU's climate change discourse differs in fundamental ways from the concept of Arctic exceptionalism. This is already evident in the underlying aims of the construction, as the concept of Arctic exceptionalism is based on deliberate efforts to desecuritized Arctic relations, whereas the EU securitizes climate change. Comparing the themes of the concept of Arctic exceptionalism with the EU's climate change discourse, two major deviations are observable. In contrast to the compartmentalization of Arctic politics, the EU's securitizing move pulls the Arctic back into the global sphere. Additionally, in contrast to the silencing of security matters and handling of environmental, societal, and economic issues as part of normalized politics, the EU's securitizing move aims at putting climate change onto the security agenda. This securitizing move has two audiences external to the EU. On the hand, the international community, whose acceptance of the move is necessary to incite further action on a global level, on the other hand, the Arctic states, whose acceptance is required to enable emergency measures within the Arctic itself.

The form of exceptionalisation evident in the EU's Arctic policy disrupts routines in the Arctic in two ways. On the one hand, it presents a physical threat, although this construction remains partly contingent on the acceptance by Arctic states. On the other hand, it pulls the Arctic onto a global level, thereby increasing insecurity. The effect of this disruption depends on which defense strategy Arctic states revert to. In the past, the Arctic states have resisted exceptional measures against climate change and kept the status quo. Due to the economic opportunities that arise in the Arctic, this is likely to remain so. Therefore, while the pull of the Arctic onto the global level has intangible impacts by increasing insecurity, visible effects or a change in routines depends on the acceptance of the securitizing move, which remains to be seen.

The Arctic states were the focus of this thesis, but they constitute only one part of the audience. Further research can take a different angle on the exceptionalisation of the Arctic to securitize a threat on the global level and examine the reaction to that move on the global level.

Additionally, throughout the securitization of climate change on the global level, the Arctic is not the only sub-unit used to argue for exceptional measures. While I will not attempt to draw generalizations from the case study conducted within this research, the context-dependent study of other examples, such as small island developing states or the Amazon rain forest, has the potential to supplement the case-specific findings of this research.

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