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TAI Bookshelf Podcast with Andreas Raspotnik

Full Transcript

Liuba Timonina:

Hi, it's Liuba.

Romain Chuffart:

And Romain.

Liuba:

And you're listening to The Arctic Institute's Bookshelf Podcast.

Romain:

In this podcast, we talk to scholars and experts about their work in new publications to make the Arctic easy and accessible to everybody.

Liuba:

So tune in and join our in depth conversations that take you beyond the headlines and right into the latest ideas, challenges and the nitty gritty of Arctic research.

Romain:

With us this week, we have Andreas Raspotnik. Andreas is a good friend, colleague and Senior Fellow at The Arctic Institute and is also part of the leadership group. He's a Senior Fellow at the High North Center at Nord University in Bodø in Northern Norway, and he works at the Fridtjof Nansen Institute in Oslo. Andreas also holds a joint PhD in political science from the University of Cologne in Germany, and the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom.

Liuba:

Andreas, thank you so much for accepting our invitation. How are you doing these days?

Andreas Raspotnik:

I'm doing all right. I am happy to talk to you guys about the most important actor in the world, or in the Arctic. Let's put it that way, I don't want to make it bigger than actually is.

Romain:

Great. As the first question, could you describe the room you're in right now and the view from your window as accurately as possible to give our listeners a view of your life?

Andreas:



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A glimpse of my life – I'm actually in the Arctic country of Austria right now in my home office, in the very south of Austria. If I look outside the window, I'm seeing very cloudy mountains, facing Slovenia. I'm actually back home where I grew up, bordering Italy and Slovenia, that three-border area of Austria, which I think is one of the most amazing places you could be in Europe, contemporary history-wise in regard to First World War areas and everything related to the Balkans. That's where I'm right now, back home.

Liuba:

That sounds really nice, and it would be very interesting to visit you someday there and learn more about that. Maybe now you could tell us more about your professional background, where you studied what you do, when and how you became interested in Arctic research.

Andreas:

How did I get started with the Arctic? In a nutshell, I did what was then called an Austrian Magister, so the earlier form of today's Master, before the Bologna process, if people know what that is, in Vienna. I did my Erasmus year in Oslo back in 2007, and when I came back from Oslo, I had to start doing research on my Master thesis. I was like, what could you work on in Austria, when it comes to doing research on whatever kind of Master-related topic. I was in Oslo, and nobody really cares about Norway, in Austria, or cares that much about Scandinavian or northern issues in Central Europe. I thought that might be a smart idea to go Norway-related. Then I did some initial research, and that was back in 2007. People in the Arctic world know what happened in 2007, when it comes to Arctic geopolitics. You had the infamous Russian flag planting, you had, sea ice melting records that year. It was very hip to deal with the Arctic. It was all over German-Austrian news, the Arctic as a potential new Cold War area and whether superpowers of the world would meet and fight over resources. That was a very tempting starting point for a young person interested in research or academia. I decided to do something Arctic-related with regard to energy. In my Master's thesis back in Vienna, I wrote on Norway's High North policy with regard to energy issues in the Barents Sea area. I jumped a bit into International Law of the Sea, domestic Norwegian policy, all that stuff.

Afterwards, I moved to Brussels to work for the European Parliament of an Austrian MEP at the European Parliament, and during that time I thought Brussels is a semi-nice city, but sorry Romain, I'm not interested in staying in Brussels for that long. I tried to figure out what I could potentially do after that job, and I found this LLM program in Tromsø on the Law of the Sea in the Arctic. After doing Erasmus in Norway, I thought, it's a nice place, let's go back there. I decided to do a second Master's at that point, and applied for the Law of the Sea program Tromsø, and I got in. I moved up to Tromsø in August 2010 to start the LLM, and I think it was the best decision. When it comes to my



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research life, I really enjoyed working on the topic. After being a political scientist, I really enjoyed doing international law, because it's more to the point than the very abstract fluffy thing we often do in political science. I had to decide and of course, write a Master's thesis again after a year there. I found a cool topic, I looked at UNCLOS's Article 234 and how Canada's new regulations, which are some vessel traffic service regulations covering the Northwest Passage, and how it's kind of applicable with UNCLOS's Article 234. I had a great supervisor with Eric Moleenaar with whom I really enjoyed working on that Master thesis. While working on that Master thesis, I had to apply for jobs, and all that fun stuff you have to do after finally leaving university. I applied for many jobs, and one of the jobs I applied for was being a Research Fellow at the University of Cologne in some three-year funded EU funded programme on EU foreign external action. I actually got the position, but part of the position was doing a PhD. When I was done with my Master thesis, I felt like, I've never again write something more than 100 pages – it's painful. With research, you're totally on your own, and I thought, I don't want to do that anymore. Anyways, you get a job; you're happy that somebody is actually satisfied with your CV and wants to hire you. I decided to move to Cologne when I got the job. Then when I had my first real meeting with the professor I would work with, Professor Wessels, a Jean Monnet chair, like an EU chair in political science, European Studies at the University of Cologne, I told him, I'll do a PhD, but only if it's Arctic-related. I've done quite some Arctic research, and I think it's a really interesting topic. Nobody cares about the Arctic really outside that Arctic bubble we're in, so I think that could be interesting. Because, I worked for an EU chair, I had to involve EU. At that point, I'd not seen any publications that discussed the EU in the Arctic, so I thought that could be exactly what people ask you for – to find a new and not yet discussed topic in your research or in your PhD. I thought, let's deal with the EU and the Arctic. And that's what I did, starting from 2011 onwards. I'm a huge fan of the idea of the European Union – you can always discuss, if the EU is the right format, and what you can change or how you can make it better. That topic really grew on me, and I think I know quite a bit about EU and the Arctic, and what's going on there, and what their interests are, and what their problems aren't or are. That's what I've done in since 2007.

Romain:

Thanks, Andi. You really seem to be passionate about your research topic. Fast forward a little, a few years ago, your research culminated in a book called, *The European Union and the Geopolitics of the Arctic*, with Edward Elgar. We'll put a link in the show notes for listeners interested in reading it. You've also published countless articles on the topic. Can you perhaps summarize the idea behind these research publications and reflect on the EU's involvement in the Arctic?

Andreas



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The book is essentially a shorter version of my PhD. You write a PhD, and you need to deal with a lot of methodology and theory, and then when you publish a book, the publishing house tells you, “we’re not interested in methodology and theory.” They leave all that stuff out, and only focus on empirics. The book is essentially a shorter version of my PhD. In a nutshell, what I tried to do with my PhD in that book was – if you look back to 2007, there’s always been a lot of talk about Arctic geopolitics and what it is. I personally think you can debate the term and the concept geopolitics, but it’s an interesting starting point to look at both geography and politics, international relations. I always found geopolitics a very interesting field of research. Based on that, and then also reading a bit into critical geopolitics where they talk about how could the European Union be a geopolitical actor, because in a very strict sense, geopolitics as a lot about strategy and military and all those things in ideal, as we all know, it’s no military power, etc.

The idea was really, could I look at the EU as a geopolitical actor, using the Arctic, and maybe Arctic geopolitics as a case study? The idea was twofold in a way, looking at how does the EU create some kind of Arcticness in Brussels, and legitimacy being an Arctic actor. Then on the other hand, also looking at, can the EU actually be characterized as a geopolitical actor. That was actually the idea behind the PhD, and then the book – to all the young researchers out there, in a nutshell, it was very painful to work interdisciplinary, because everyone in research tells you that you have to be interdisciplinary, and then if you actually do work interdisciplinary, then people fall back in traps: “why did you do it that way?” I tried to use critical geopolitics in a very political science, EU studies-related environment. So that was a challenge itself, but there was a lot of fun in it. That’s what research is about: you can always debate findings and approaches and methodologies – that was more the research part. When it comes to the EU in the Arctic, if we look back, the first communication was really in 2008. You can always say that people started to work on the Arctic in 2007. During that time, the Arctic actually became a bit more prominent global headlines as well. My short summary about doing the Arctic, it’s like you try to create some kind of Arcticness both inside and outside the EU. Inside the EU, really convince other actors within the US system and other individuals that the EU as a global actor should also be involved in Arctic affairs. Then on the other hand, also convince Arctic actors that, despite EU member states being Arctic, there’s also the EU as a supranational entity should also be involved in Arctic affairs. That’s more or less what the EU tries to do in a nutshell, for more than 10 years rather successfully and with step forwards and steps back. The EU is what you call in English, “a welcome enemy” for a lot of people to criticize. Overall, I think that’s more or less what the US been doing in the Arctic, determining why Europe as a bigger entity should be involved in Arctic affairs, what it could bring to the Arctic governance table. It’s a lot about research and funding, but also a lot about the EU as a global actor with regard to environmental protection mechanisms and sustainable development on all these issues. I often co author articles,



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and I co authored one article review on there, and I do a lot of work with our good friend Andreas Østhagen, but also my very good friend Adam Stepien from the University of Lapland on broad issues of use Arctic such as inside Brussels, how do different institutions in Brussels see the Arctic and see their Arctic role within the EU system, but also how do other states think about the Arctic or the EU and the Arctic, and everything related to that.

Liuba:

Thank you so much, Andreas, for so many interesting reflections, and talking about the inside of the EU and the old policymaking scene. It is such a dynamic network environment, especially this EU corner in Brussels. I wonder, how easy or how hard it's been to engage in this Arctic talks and advocate the changes which are needed, based on your own research finding and those of your colleagues. Do you have any thoughts to share about that?

Andreas:

Definitely. It's a great question, because I was asked a similar thing. So going back to my PhD, as I said before, I was funded by a research framework seven program on analyzing EU's external actions. It was called *EXACT* and the University of Cologne was actually behind that as one of the lead partners. We had our final conference after three years in Brussels, and one of the questions was, how easy was it for us young researchers to actually talk to commission officials, to official EU action and action service, EU parliamentarians, etc. Some of my colleagues had difficulties reaching out to people working on certain issues, or really getting the feedback they wanted. I always thought that the Arctic being such a niche in Brussels, only a few people would be working on this issue. I find it to be easy to get in touch with these people to meet them again and again, over all these years. I think they started to realize that my intent doing research was not to overstep them, but try to create some neutral objective analysis of what EU is doing. I really got fond of a lot of people working in the EU sphere on the Arctic, because you meet them again and again, and the Arctic is a bubble and the Arctic research is a super bubble, so you meet people again and again at various conferences, all over Europe, all over the world. Meeting all of these officials and getting to know them better, and them providing you certain information, which you also should not reveal this information, but it's nice background information for whatever you do. I found working on that topic, and then also trying to engage in deeper discussions about the Arctic, not only, was I getting some information out of them on what the EU is doing, but also what could EU potentially also do and also to be a better accepted Arctic stakeholder act? What are future Arctic challenges? I really enjoyed doing that, and I hope I will continue to do that for a longer period.

Liuba:



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That's great to hear that. I wonder if you notice any change in the narrative, about the Arctic within the EU in the past several years. I know that in one of your articles, you talk about the difficulty of developing a very good, convincing EU-Arctic narrative, and the fact that EU lags behind – that it's always on the same high-level talks. Do you have any views on that?

Andreas:

The starting point is – every institutional actor, and it's a lot of individuals working on that – we always see all these institutions, be it ministries or be it EU in that case, the Commission, the parliament is a very abstract building. There are individuals working on this topic, and these individuals have to some extent more interest in a topic or lesser interest in that topic. What I found very interesting is that the more people are personally engaged with the topic, the more it has a meaningful and deeper impact in on the policy as such. With the EU, you could definitely see – that's my, my experience. There was a learning experience with all of us in the Arctic of 2008. It's not the Arctic of today; a lot of the discussion back in 2008 was influenced by a few foreign affairs already. They call, or something like that, the Arctic, the new arena for the next Cold War, and I think that had an impact on some kind of policies. Then there was a learning experience over the last decade on what the EU could actually do in the Arctic, and what different institutional actors could actually provide to the Arctic discussion. With regard to the narrative, one always needs to be careful, as well. We are very strict sometimes especially Adam, stepping in saying, there's no narrative behind, but everyone in the Arctic be it in Norway, or Canada, or wherever needs to realize that the Arctic, as a topic as a region, is a niche in Brussels. There are way more important issues in Brussels than the Arctic, and the challenges in the Arctic. If you start from that premise, and that starting point: everything is relative to what EU was developing. The people working on the Arctic within Brussels, they do an exceptional job in trying to create a very nuanced approach to the issue, really developing knowledge on what EU could actually bring to the Arctic table in a meaningful way. Not saying, “we want to bring research funding” or whatever it is, but really saying, “okay, we could help here and there.” I think that's a very honest approach, keeping in mind that we've had have a new commission since last year, and the Arctic is not on the agenda, even though they're talking about the Green Deal, or whatever it is. Based on that, I think everything the EU does needs to be considered from that starting point.

Romain:

Thanks, Andi, and reading your research and what you've just said, it also seems that EU is in a unique position in the Arctic: the Arctic is both an internal issue with Sweden, Finland, as member states, but also an external issue, for example, engaging with neighbors such as Russia, or building relations of the Arctic country. Going back to what you said, by creating a coherent Arctic narrative, how could the EU actually manage to



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create such a coherent identity and policy with all these different perspectives in the region?

Andreas:

I wonder if the EU is in a unique position. If you look, for example, at Canada, they have Arctic policies that are targeting a domestic audience. And then you have also foreign policy related to the Arctic. I think every Arctic state has that to some extent, but you're totally correct. The interesting thing about the EU is that you have this exceptional international actor, Romain you're a lawyer, you know the *sui generis* form of the EU from that starting point, then you have this internal aspect with Finland and Sweden, and this very interesting Denmark-Greenland relationship, then you have Norway and Iceland with the European Economic Area agreement relationship, and then you have external actions with regards to Russia or the US, and Canada. The analysis is a bit as always, in today's world, it's not black and white; you have to have a nuanced approach to what EU could develop in certain Arctic levels. For example, we always talk about that the EU should really focus on their own European Arctic, really discussing how to regionally develop maybe the peripheries of Sweden and Finland. But if you look at that only, then you quickly come to the solution that Sweden and Finland are not Arctic Ocean coastal states, and then there's a different Arctic discussion involved. You also have that EU's interest into maritime governance, especially pushed by director general maritime affairs, which is the lead in the Commission. There the focus is much on fisheries and ocean governance. Then you step into bigger Arctic discussions beyond the European Arctic. I think, to really create a narrative is super difficult. I will keep on arguing that EU should create a narrative of how it should be involved in the Arctic, but it's extremely difficult. I don't know how you could really develop something as such, but you need to go step by step and also be honest about yourself. I think the most provoking thing you could always say to Arctic actors, but also to the EU, is the climate change debate, because there is this argument that, for example, the EU needs to be involved in the Arctic because of climate change. Romain, when we co-authored an article where we are actually tackling that question. If you really want to tackle global climate change, then you don't need to be involved in the Arctic. You need to tackle it all over the rest of the developed world, and then you can deal with regional climate change effects in the Arctic. The narrative that any external Arctic actor, outside Arctic actor needs to be involved in the Arctic affairs because of climate changes – it's not fully convincing.

Coming back to the narrative, it's extremely difficult to develop one, especially for this *sui generis* international activity use, and the various different voices coming from Brussels. I'm always very critical with journalists, especially when they talk about 'EU's doing that and that,' or 'the EU is doing that.' The EU is not the EU – there're very different voices coming from EU with different competencies, and you need to be precise



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on what the EU a supranational actor actually can do in any foreign affairs related topics, but also in the Arctic.

Romain:

Thanks, Andi, and thanks for plugging our joint paper. It was great working with you. In another paper published recently, that you co-wrote with Natalia Skripnikova, you talk about how Russia sees the EU-Arctic engagement, how the EU is seen outside of the EU. Could you talk a bit more on how the Union is perceived by other actors such as Russia, for example?

Andreas:

Of course. First of all, Romain and Liuba, the key to success in academia, is self-promotion, so whenever you are able to promote yourself, do it. Now jokes aside, working on EU-Arctic issues, I actually get a lot of emails from young students that work on the topic that ask for whatever kind of help. I've now realized that a lot of excellent work is out there and Natalia approached me two years ago at the High North Dialogue in Buda that she was writing on Russia's perception, and Norway's perception of the UN, the Arctic, and if I could help her with a Master thesis. I was happy to do so. When she eventually came back to me with the final piece, I thought "that's excellent research, and I think you should publish that and I'm happy to help you, and coauthor that, but give you full credit of your work," because that's your baby, and I can be a little help. Most of the research on Russia's public perception of the Arctic was done by Natalia, and I was just doing a framework around it. The interesting thing is we don't know much about Canadian, American, Russian, and Norwegian in perceptions of EU in the Arctic. We have some newspapers, articles from time to time. If you work in that field, you often talk to officials, and you have some kind of idea of what some states think about the EU in the Arctic, but for the broader public, we don't know much about it. I think that's something really worth jumping in research wise. That was also the case with Russia in the Arctic. I'm not the biggest expert on Russia's Arctic policies, but we all know that Russia, as such, was very reluctant to bring outsiders actually into the Arctic. This is changing a bit, and with the EU and the Arctic. Actually back in 1999, or 1998, it was actually Russia that was pushing for the EU to become an observer to the Arctic Council, and these things change for obvious reasons not related to the Arctic. Now today, we have Canada, promoting or being pro-EU observer status to the Arctic Council, but Russia being against because of Ukraine and Crimea.

It was interesting to read and dig a bit deeper into what the public media thinks about the EU and the Arctic. Again, if the Arctic is a niche, it's not the biggest topic in Russian media – the EU's Arctic involvement – but it's interesting to read how that changed over the years and how some have some see the EU and the Arctic as a copartner, partners that could work together, which is totally different to the eastern neighborhood, or some other



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parts of the world, to Syria or something. So that was interesting. I think that reflects a bit in public statements; a few public statements out there, Russian actors say we should work together with EU in the Arctic, and the same thing in Brussels as well. Regardless, even if you look at public statements like the global strategy by the high representatives, that we should work together with Russia, in some cases, and the Arctic is one of these cases. So that's also reflected, to some extent in public media; in Russian public media it wasn't reflected in Russian public.

Liuba:

It sounds like a great idea for research topic enough for a Master thesis or PhD thesis. Especially I think for Russian speaking researchers who are in some cases actually under-represented, and in regards to the EU and the UK, especially. You've been talking about creating a more nuanced approach to understanding the Arctic within the EU and also engaging early career scientists, based on your experience. I wonder if the research community actually needs to go another way some other way and rather join in activist actions or movements to raise awareness or raise its visibility in Brussels, do you think that it could be a way forward?

Andreas:

It's difficult; it should be based on each individual. Some people are more the research folks, who like to do research and read and think about deeper think about issues. Some are more about the op-eds, guys like to read policy briefs, and be on Twitter, and give interviews whatever about Arctic topics. I think it should be the decision of one of each of us what we want to do and what we could bring to the table. Some love to be in the public front, and some don't. I don't know if researchers need to change. What we need to change, I think, what I experienced also with research is the system is flawed to some degree in a way. We are really dependent on journal articles, articles and publications, and that entire publication system sometimes makes you so mad. When you submit something, you get reviews that are that are not really reviews, that are some other people just trying to argue for the sake of argument; all these things we constantly, constantly have to deal with for the entire research funding issue, where we need to look for money in order to do actually our work. Most of research work is actually not doing research, but applying for projects and finance your day-to-day job. It's a tricky business, because on the other hand we work with public money, and I always find it difficult to argue of why a hairdresser or a plumber should finance my work on EU-Arctic narratives. It's not that easy, and I think we need to be very convincing on why actually we are needed out there and why we should do what we think is necessary to do. I think that should also be reflected in each of us, what we like as individuals. Do we like to be in the public front and give interviews and be activists for a certain thing or try to convince policymakers to do that and that? Or do we try what I like more be researchers. There's no need to always be in the front and write thousands of op-eds on the same topic without really doing more



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and more research. As I said before, there are some publications out there now by me and then coauthored with others on the EU and the Arctic, but at some point you have to ask yourself, “do I bring anything new to the table? Is that just the same old?” When doing research – I read this really cool statement by Lassi Heininen who said something like, “Arctic geopolitics comes and goes in waves and now we see a new wave in Arctic geopolitics because of China now. Everything is not about Arctic anarchy anymore, but it's now again, how the Arctic is such a geopolitical arena or merchant geopolitical arena.” Maybe it's true or not, but maybe it's just another wave. We can only do more and more research, deeper research, to actually figure out if that's true or not, but not always write the same old op-eds on that topic. Again, that's an individual decision, and some would argue that research needs to be more active, needs to have a more activism approach, and some others would argue, no.

Romain:

That sounds super interesting and inspiring Andi, and we try to be mindful of your time here, so I think we'll wrap up. Thank you for such a great conversation. We hope we've inspired many researchers to dig in into the fascinating world of EU-Arctic relations. Thank you so much for joining us.

Andreas:

I just wanted to thank you guys for creating the podcast. To all the few people that will actually listen to this podcast, keep in mind that The Arctic Institute is run by young people, and I'm even still considering myself young. But it's run by young people, and it is for young people. So if you have a cool idea you want to have published, or you have something interesting to say about the Arctic, reach out to us at The Arctic Institute and try to get it published and be a platform for young people to publish their thoughts on Arctic issues and anything article related. I think that's the podcast is where one idea to get more and more young people involved.

Liuba:

Thank you, Andi. I guess we're feeling flattered, and we'll keep on our work on the show.

[Transcribed by TAI Research Assistant Mariel Kieval]