

Summary of the PhD thesis

Perspectives on securitization of the Arctic region

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The PhD thesis entitled: *Perspectives on securitization of the Arctic region* examines the processes of securitizations that have emerged in the Arctic region amid the profound changes that the region is facing. The phenomenon of global warming has also made its presence felt in the High North, with estimates showing that the region is warming four times faster than the rest of the planet (Rantanen et. al, 2022). Rapid warming is causing accelerated melting of ice and permafrost, which is opening up previously inaccessible areas for the expansion of economic activities. A number of opportunities have thus arisen in the region, such as the exploration and exploitation of rich oil and gas resources, the emergence of new trade transportation routes, with the potential to shorten the time spent on traditional routes, and rich fisheries. This is transforming the region from a relatively isolated area into a strategic frontier of global interest.

The newfound accessibility of the Arctic has attracted regional as well as non-Arctic actors, with China being the external actor from outside the region that has shown most interest in the region. However, the profound changes that the Arctic is undergoing have led to both opportunities and challenges: while the potential for resource exploitation and shortening of sea routes offers economic benefits, it also brings environmental degradation, increased military presence and heightened geopolitical tensions. At the same time, even in the absence of this growing interest, the region faces the severe effects of global warming on its already fragile environment.

In the light of the permanent challenges facing the region, the use of the term security has become increasingly common in public discourse, normative documents, as well as in the Arctic strategies of the states in the region, and the term has been associated with a variety of issues. We are talking about a number of risks and challenges on several levels that have been introduced into the security sphere and have been discussed in close connection with the national security of littoral states. Some of these are represented by environmental, economic or social security. By associating the concept of security with issues that were otherwise

outside the traditional meaning of the term, a "*state of emergency*" was created to address the problem at hand and to draw greater public attention to it.

The Copenhagen School came up with the proposal to broaden the security agenda to include issues outside the military domain, thus turning non-military elements into potential security threats (Buzan et. al. 1998, 1-5, Wæver 1995). Securitization is described as a "*speech act*" whereby influential actors, such as political leaders and policy-makers, qualify certain issues as existential threats to national or regional security.

The main objective of the paper is to analyze how actors involved in the region securitize certain existing regional issues or topics.

The securitization theory, as defined by the Copenhagen School, serves as the theoretical basis for this paper, also taking into account the criticisms of the theory. Therefore, in studying the securitization of the Arctic region, I have also considered Balzacq's (2005) perspective on the importance of the circumstances in which securitization takes place, depending on the psychocultural profile of the audience, the power the audience has and the power of the securitizing actor. Therefore, for each analysed case, I focused my attention not only on the identification of speech acts and the acceptance or rejection coming from the audience, but also on the context in which securitization occurs. Therefore, I looked at the political context in which the securitization took place, the position of the securitizing actor in terms of its authority and ability to influence, and the way in which it approaches the issue under discussion. Beyond the basic speech act and the validation coming from the audience, the act of securitization complements the process when the securitizing actor is taking either extraordinary or other types of actions (Balzacq 2011). I therefore examined the consequences of securitization and the policy measures taken as a result.

Taking into account the complexity and diversity of the existing issues in the region, I considered it necessary to narrow them down in order to provide a clearer picture of the securitization process. To this end, I identified three main themes that dominate the narratives at the regional level, from which there are ramifications to other sub-themes of interest. The three themes identified are:

- 1) environmental and climate change,
- 2) natural resources and energy,
- 3) the return of great power competition in the Arctic.

For each of these themes, I have chosen a security actor that has stood out on the respective plane as follows:

- 1) for environmental and climate change- the European Union
- 2) on natural resources and energy - Norway
- 3) for the return of great power competition in the Arctic - the United States of America

A second objective derived from the main one is to determine what are the effects of securitization of regional issues on the global level. The growing interest of external actors in the Arctic region coincides with the increasing use of security language, which has put the region on the agenda in international affairs. This is also reflected in the fact that the Arctic is increasingly referred to as a common good. The Arctic strategic document published by China in 2018 makes such a reference, justifying China's involvement in regional affairs (State Council, People's Republic of China, 2018). Likewise, a statement by Federica Mogherini in 2017, when she was High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, stated, *"it is no longer a border, but a gateway to Europe and a crossroads between continents. It is a shared asset and we have a shared responsibility to preserve it - for its people and for the world"* (Mogherini 2017).

Also relevant for this research I found the regional security complex theory, which states that a regional security complex is determined by the relations between actors located in the same geographical region and the security interactions between them. The Arctic region has been framed under this concept as a result of this analysis, by which I checked the fulfillment of the four variables, namely (1) geographic boundaries or delimitation (2) anarchic structure (3) polarity and (4) social construction (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 45). In order to make the framing complete, I have also referred to the securitization and de-securitization movements in the region and the interplay between them.

The research has a qualitative approach, focusing on content analysis of documents relevant to the Arctic space. Thus, the Arctic strategies of both regional and foreign actors, national defense strategies, as well as treatises relevant to this topic represent the documentary basis for this paper. At the same time, we have also referred to the speech acts included in speeches and statements that have come over time from on the part of decision-makers and officials, in which different themes were introduced into the security sphere. The time period covered by this research is 2007-2021, the chosen range is so large because the securitizations

that the three actors are doing are focused on different time periods. Thus, the choice of a larger time frame allows for the inclusion of the different periods in which securitizations have been used for all three actors.

The research is guided by four key questions designed to help understand the dynamics of securitization in the Arctic region:

1. How do the European Union, Norway and the United States use the language of security?
2. What is the context in which securitization takes place?
3. Why do actors in the region use securitization?
4. What are the global effects of the increasing use of security language in Arctic discourse?

Over the years, the European Union (EU) has established itself as an international leader on climate and environmental change, embarking on many ambitious climate and environmental goals. EU policy on the Arctic underlines the importance of the region for global climate stability and calls for international cooperation to mitigate the environmental impacts of climate change. The EU's narrative often positions the Arctic as a barometer of the global climate situation, with changes in the region serving as early warnings for the rest of the world. The Union's involvement in securitizing the Arctic environment is also motivated by its geographical proximity to the region, as the impacts of Arctic warming - such as rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions - directly affect European territories. The EU is promoting a vision of sustainable Arctic development that balances environmental protection with economic opportunities, calling for strict environmental standards and greater international oversight of Arctic activities. This approach reflects a broader trend in the European Union's approach to securitize climate and environmental change globally. Looking at the reasons behind the securitization that the EU is doing in the Arctic, I have concluded that this is happening primarily to underline the stringency of climate and environmental change, the threat it poses to the Arctic space and, consequently, the need to act as quickly and effectively as possible to mitigate it and build adaptation mechanisms. A second reason is that, through this securitization, having established a leading position in the field, the Union is given access to regional issues and to the negotiating table. This is very important given that

the EU's legitimacy in the region has been questioned on several occasions and in the context that the Union also has important interests in the region in terms of natural resources, emerging transportation routes and changing security dynamics in the region.

As far as Norway is concerned, it plays a key role in securitizing Arctic energy resources, while the country's economy is heavily dependent on the exploitation of natural resources. Since the 2000s, discussions on the energy sector have started to be framed in terms of security in various forms, which can be seen in several official statements and documents. The paper has revealed that the introduction of energy in the security sphere has several dimensions in the Norwegian case, which have varied over time depending on the international political context. In the first instance, the security language is used to emphasize the importance of this sector in Norway's High North policy and Norway's strategic role as an exporter. The documents and statements analyzed from the first years of the millennium also emphasize Norway's responsibility in managing these resources, as well as the possibility of an increase in global demand, which could put pressure on the state. It also discusses the importance of these resources and thus the emerging risks in the event of disruptions. A third perspective in relation to bringing energy into the security sphere is related to Europe's energy needs and Norway's ability to respond to them. Basically, the idea of energy security, in this case, is used for the European space, with a focus on Norway's role in strengthening it for Europe. Finally, the last perspective is that of energy security through the lenses of infrastructure. Possible accidents or breakdowns in the energy infrastructure can lead to disruptions, jeopardizing Norway's energy security.

The third theme under discussion is the return of the great power competition in the Arctic. The transformation of the Arctic into a region of strategic importance has coincided with an upsurge in competition between the major powers, Russia, the United States and China. The thesis explores how these powers are asserting their influence in the Arctic, often through military means, and how this competition is reshaping the region's security landscape.

Russia has been particularly active in expanding its presence in the Arctic, reopening Soviet-era military bases, deploying advanced weaponry and conducting large-scale military exercises near strategic points in the region. The symbolic planting of a Russian flag on the seabed below the North Pole in 2007 marked a turning point, signaling Russia's intention to assert sovereignty over large parts of the Arctic. Russia's assertiveness in the region has been presented as necessary to protect its economic interests and safeguard its Arctic borders, while also raising concerns among other Arctic members and NATO about the potential for conflict.

For its part, China, although not an Arctic state, has declared itself a "*near-Arctic*" power and has steadily increased its presence in the region. China's Arctic policy, unveiled in 2018, emphasizes scientific research, resource exploration and the development of shipping routes as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. While China portrays these activities as peaceful and cooperative, Western powers often view them with suspicion, fearing that Beijing's growing influence could upset the delicate geopolitical balance in the Arctic. Its partnership with the Russian Federation in the region further heightens these fears.

The United States thus views Russian and Chinese activities in the Arctic as direct challenges to its strategic interests. The United States has responded by increasing its military presence in the region, updating its Arctic strategy to emphasize national defense, and conducting freedom of navigation operations to counter Russia's territorial claims. In the context of the two states' increased activity in the region, regional dynamics have increasingly begun to be viewed through the US security lens. Thus, several documents, strategies and statements coming from the American side describe the activity of the two states as a threat to US national security. This process of securitization has also led to an even greater US presence in the region, in contrast to the reluctant approach immediately after the end of the Cold War.

The paper reveals the different methods by which each of the three actors securitizes, as well as the different motives behind this process. At the same time, these processes bring even more changes in regional dynamics by introducing the security dimension and draw attention to the region. The international impact of the securitization of the Arctic region translates into even greater attention and interest in the region. What is also important is that this increased interest brings both benefits, such as the economic development of the region, but also challenges, such as overexploitation of resources or increased tensions between states.

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