

# THE 2010 NORWAY – RUSSIA MARINE BOUNDARY AGREEMENT AND BILATERAL COOPERATION ON INTEGRATED OCEANS MANAGEMENT

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On 15 September 2010 the prime ministers of Norway and the Russian Federation met in Murmansk and signed an “Agreement between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation on Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Polar Ocean” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010).<sup>1</sup> More than three decades in the making, the agreement draws a boundary between the two countries in the Barents Sea, continues cooperation in fisheries, and lays the framework for cooperation on petroleum deposits straddling the boundary (Henriksen and Ulfstein, 2010). The agreement entered into force in July 2011. Its significance goes well beyond the Barents Sea, as it demonstrated the capability of Arctic countries to resolve issues in a peaceful manner on the basis of international law (Hoel, 2010). The agreement settles the most important outstanding foreign policy issues between the two countries and opens up new opportunities for cooperation, which is likely to have important repercussions also at the domestic level.

The purpose of this article is to give a brief overview of the new boundary agreement in the Barents Sea, the history of its negotiation and context. Following a sketch of the bio-geographical status of the area and a brief account of relevant aspects of the law of the sea, the 40 years negotiation process is described, before the agreement itself is addressed. The article concludes with some observations on the implications of the agreement at various levels of governance.

## The Barents Sea

The Barents Sea is bordered in the west by the Norwegian Sea, and in the east by Novaya Zemlya. It stretches from the Norwegian and Russian coasts in the south to about 80 °N, covering an area of about 1.4 million km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>2</sup> It is relatively shallow, with an average depth of 230 m. An inflow of warm Atlantic water from the southwest supports high biological productivity and keeps large parts of the Barents Sea ice-free year-round.

Because the waters are shallow, vertical mixing normally goes down to the bottom in winter, bringing nutrients up to the productive surface waters where they sustain biological production in spring. Variations in environmental conditions result in large seasonal and inter-annual fluctuations in the production of phyto- and zooplankton and therefore in the food for fish, seabirds and marine mammals (Wassman et al., 2006).

There are more than 200 fish species in the Barents Sea (Sakshaug et al., 2009). Some fish species, such as herring and cod, spend parts of the year or part of their

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Norwegian: “Overenskomst mellom Kongeriket Norge og Den Russiske Føderasjon om maritim avgrensning og samarbeid i Barentshavet og Polhavet.”

<sup>2</sup> The International Hydrographic Organization (1953) provides a technical definition of the Barents Sea.

life cycle in the Barents Sea and the rest along the Norwegian mainland coast and in the Norwegian Sea. For polar cod and capelin, the Barents Sea is a spawning ground, nursery area and feeding area.

The high production of plankton and fish in the Barents Sea supports about 25 million birds, one of the largest seabird colonies in the world. A number of marine mammals forage in the Barents Sea and calve in temperate waters further south, while others spend their whole lives in the Arctic. About 3000 marine species have been recorded in the Barents Sea.

The main commercial activity in the Barents Sea is fisheries. Important fisheries include Northeast Arctic cod, Northeast Arctic haddock, capelin, herring, tusk, ling, wolf-fish, deep-sea redfish, Northeast Atlantic Greenland halibut and shrimp and king crab. Fisheries in the Barents Sea are dominated by Norway and Russia with some catches taken by third countries. Most fisheries are sustainable (Sunnanå, 2011).

*Petroleum*-related activities are growing. Seismic surveys and exploration drilling for oil and gas began in 1980. Up to 2011, about 90 wells have been drilled (Petroleum Directorate, 2011, 32). Discoveries are mainly gas, but also some oil has been found. The Barents Sea North of 74° 30' is not open for petroleum prospecting.

### **International law and marine boundary delimitation**

International ocean law specifies the rules for how the oceans and the natural resources there are to be divided. The 1982 Law of the Sea Convention,<sup>3</sup> which was negotiated during the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (1974-1982), came into force in 1994; more than 160 countries have ratified the treaty.<sup>4</sup> Other important treaties in the context of ocean delimitation include the 1958 Continental Shelf Convention (in force since 1964).

The provisions of the law of the sea stipulate who can decide what where. A significant aspect of the development of ocean law over the decades is the extension of coastal state jurisdiction. The 1982 Convention establishes that coastal states have sovereign rights over natural resources in a 200-nautical mile (370-kilometer) Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), calculated from baselines running along the coast. In the EEZ, the coastal states have sovereign rights over natural resources and can decide how these resources are to be managed and used (Churchill and Lowe, 1999). These rights on the part of coastal states are balanced with duties to manage resources sustainably and to cooperate with other countries to this end.

Beyond the EEZ are the high seas. Here, the basic principle is the freedom of the high seas. It is the flag state that has jurisdiction over vessels operating here.

Important to the issue of delimitation, the 1982 Convention makes a distinction between the water column and the continental shelf. Coastal state jurisdiction over the water column ends at the 200-mile boundary. Its jurisdiction on the continental shelf, however, extends to where the continental shelf meets the deep seabed. Where the continental shelf goes beyond 200 nautical miles, coastal states have to submit

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Montego Bay 10 December 1982. See: <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/index.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference\\_files/chronological\\_lists\\_of\\_ratifications.htm#The%20United%20Nations%20Convention%20on%20the%20Law%20of%20the%20Sea](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference_files/chronological_lists_of_ratifications.htm#The%20United%20Nations%20Convention%20on%20the%20Law%20of%20the%20Sea)

information on the outer limits of the continental shelf to the Continental Shelf Commission set up by the 1982 Convention. The Commission makes recommendations to coastal states on matters related to the establishment of those outer limits.

In drawing the marine boundaries between countries, the basic rule of international law is that delimitation shall be by agreement between the interested states. In the absence of such an agreement, certain rules apply: the 1958 Continental Shelf Convention requires boundaries to be based on an equidistance principle. The subsequent 1982 Convention establishes that boundary solutions are to be “equitable”. Exactly what “equitable” means is unclear, but state practice and cases before international judiciaries<sup>5</sup> indicate that, between opposing coasts, an equidistance line modified by geographical circumstances is the basic rule for dividing ocean territories.

### **Drawing the boundary**

The land boundary between Norway and Russia was concluded in 1826 (Nielsen, 2005).<sup>6</sup> The first, initial steps towards a marine boundary between Norway and the then Soviet Union was taken in 1957 by an agreement on the marine boundary in the inshore area of Varangerfjord (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007).

The discussions between the two countries on a marine boundary in the Barents Sea were initiated by Norway in 1970, aiming for a delimitation of the continental shelf in the Barents Sea. Formal talks between the two countries were taking place from 1974 onwards (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, 2), with varying degrees of intensity. With the developments in international ocean law during the 1970’s and the establishment of Exclusive Economic Zones by Norway in 1977 and the Soviet Union the following year, the talks also came to include also a boundary for the EEZ (water) and not only the continental shelf.

The two countries had different ideas for how the boundary line should be drawn (Tresselt, 1988): Norway’s position was that the boundary line should to be drawn according to the equidistance principle laid down in the 1958 Continental Shelf Convention, with the boundary in equal distance from the land areas on each side. The Soviet Union advocated a boundary drawn according to the sector principle, along a meridian from the end point of the land boundary between the two countries to the North Pole, with adjustments in the Svalbard area.<sup>7</sup>

The resulting disputed area, to the east of the sector line and to the west of the equidistance line, was 175 200 km<sup>2</sup>, running from the outer limit of the territorial waters, between Svalbard and Novaya Zemlya and into the Arctic Ocean (figure 1).

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<sup>5</sup> Such as the International Court of Justice or the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea. The Law of the Sea Convention establishes the latter.

<sup>6</sup> It has remained in force since, except for the period 1920 - 1945 when Finland established a corridor between the two.

<sup>7</sup> In 1926, the Soviet Union declared all territories to the north of the Soviet Union up to the North Pole as belonging to the Soviet Union. The claim was bounded in the west by a line running along the 32°04’ east meridian, adjusted to 35° East between 74 and 81° North, in order to include islands of the Svalbard archipelago which were under Norwegian sovereignty by the 1920 Svalbard Treaty.

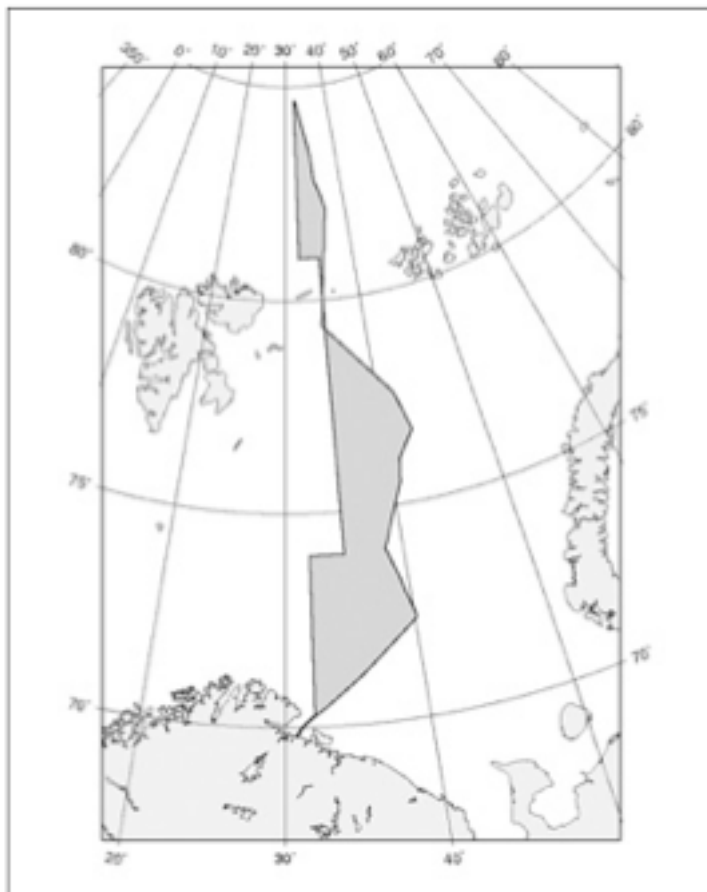


Figure 1: The disputed area.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010.

In absence of a boundary, there was a need for arrangement for the enforcement of fisheries regulations towards third countries in the disputed area. Norway and the Soviet Union could enforce regulations towards their own vessels. But in order to exercise control over the fishery from vessels from third countries, it was necessary to establish an arrangement where Norway enforced regulations towards third countries it had licensed, and Russia likewise. A so-called “Grey Zone” of 67 000 km<sup>2</sup> was established for this purpose. The arrangement was heavily criticized in Norway for being unbalanced in favor of the Soviet Union (Østreng, 1982).<sup>8</sup>

Also, in the northeastern part of the Barents Sea a large area of 55 000 km<sup>2</sup> remained outside the EEZs of the two countries. These waters are high seas, beyond the jurisdiction of the two coastal states. Fisheries in this “Loophole” have been nearly non-existent, except during the 1990s when a substantial cod fishery took place for about 5 years. It was terminated through international agreements between the two coastal states and Iceland, whose vessels was behind most of the fishery in the Loophole (Schram Stokke, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> The agreement covered an area with 23 000 km<sup>2</sup> in undisputed Norwegian waters and 3 000 km<sup>2</sup> in undisputed Soviet waters. Hence, it was considered imbalanced by many observers in Norway.

The talks over the years had their ups and downs. At the height of the cold war, the small state Norway was skeptical to Soviet intentions. Repeated proposals from the Soviet Union for arrangements that entailed some form of co-management of the disputed area or parts of it were rejected by Norway, who has consistently worked for a clear and unambiguous boundary (Kvalvik, 2004; Churchill and Ulfstein, 1992).

The end of the cold war gradually brought a better climate for negotiating a border. General cooperation between the two countries increased in several respects, and the regional Barents cooperation contributed to enhance the general trust and cooperation among nations in the North. A state visit by President V Putin in 2002 provided a new impetus for reaching an agreement, and an agreement between the foreign ministers J G Støre and S Lavrov in 2006 signalled intensified efforts towards a final agreement.

In 2007 an Agreement on a boundary in the Varangerfjord area (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007) was adopted, entering into force 9 July 2008. This agreement, building on the 1957 agreement, draws the boundary from the endpoint of the land boundary and 73 km seawards to where the sector and equidistance lines intersect, signalled that something substantial was in works.

In parallel with these developments, Norway and Russia were following up on the provisions in the Law of the Sea Convention regarding the delimitation of their outer continental shelves. Russia, with its enormous Arctic coastline, submitted its information on the geological properties of its continental shelf to the Continental Shelf Commission in 2001, and Norway followed suit in 2006 (CLCS, 2009). The Commission has asked for more information from Russia, who intend to resubmit its geological information in 2012.<sup>9</sup> The commission adopted recommendations on the outer limits of the Norwegian continental shelf in 2009, the first country in the Arctic coastal states. The Commission recommendations clarified that the entire Barents Sea is continental shelf and therefore under the jurisdiction of the two.

Also relevant to the process towards an agreed boundary was an increasing international political attention to the Arctic, driven by prospects for natural resources (Brigham, 2011). This led to increasing contact between the coastal states in the region, producing the 2009 Ilulissat Declaration (Anon 2008) stating that the five coastal states to the central Arctic Ocean are committed to the legal framework provided by the Law of the Sea Convention and that they would work for the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims.

### **The agreed boundary**

After nearly 40 years of talks, on 27 April 2010 Norway and Russia announced that they had agreed to a boundary in the Barents Sea. The occasion was a state visit by president V Medvedev, and the joint “Joint Statement on maritime delimitation and cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean” of 27 April 2010 spelled out the broad terms of the agreement. The opening paragraph describes the motivation for the agreement thus:

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<sup>9</sup> According to a report in Barents Observer, 13 December 2011. <http://www.barentsobserver.com/russias-arctic-shelf-bid-90-percent-complete.4997904-116321.html>

Recognising our mutual determination to strengthen our good neighbourly relations, secure stability and enhance cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean, we are pleased to announce that our negotiating delegations have reached preliminary agreement on the bilateral maritime delimitation between our two countries in these areas, which has been the object of extensive negotiations over the years.<sup>10</sup>

The actual agreement was signed by prime minister J Stoltenberg of Norway and prime minister V Putin of Russia in Murmansk on 15 September 2010. The Norwegian Storting debated the agreement during winter 2011 and the Russian Duma in spring. With the conclusion of ratification procedures the agreement entered into force on 7 July 2011.

The agreed boundary divides the disputed area of 175 200 km<sup>2</sup> into two equal parts of approximately 87 600 km<sup>2</sup>, with a boundary line 1,680 kilometers long. The total boundary from endpoint of land boundary in Varanger, including the part agreed to in the 2007 agreement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007), is 1750 kilometers, almost as long as the distance between Oslo and Rome.

The entire Barents Sea is a continental shelf, and while the shelf comes under the jurisdiction of the two states in its entirety, the waters in the area beyond national jurisdiction, the “Loophole”, are high seas. The boundary line on the shelf cuts straight through the area beyond national jurisdiction.

The Norwegian Government’s proposition to the Storting seeking the consent to enter into the agreement (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), states that the agreement builds on international law and the rules of international ocean law on marine boundary delimitation, in particular articles 74 and 83 of Law of the Sea Convention which concerns delimitation of EEZs and continental shelves respectively, requiring states to aim for an equitable result in establishing marine boundaries. Also, a number of international court cases have provided guidance as to methods for delimitation and factors to be taken into account. Particular weight is accorded to geographical properties of coastlines and differences in coastal length (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, 6). Socioeconomic factors, size of population, etc. are not considered relevant in this regard.

In the Barents Sea, the questions relating to factors and methods were complex, due to the large disputed area, the complex configuration of the respective coastlines, and the existence of a high seas area beyond the EEZs of the two countries. The considerably longer Russian coastline resulted therefore in a westward shift of the boundary in the southern part of the Barents Sea relative to an equidistant line (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, 6).

A special feature of the agreement is a “special area” to the east of the boundary drawing the EEZ of Russia further to the North than it was without the agreement. This results from Norway consenting to Russian exercise of jurisdiction in an area to the east of the boundary line that would have been within the Norwegian EEZ if the equidistance line were the boundary.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Joint Statement on maritime delimitation and cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean. <http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/Folkerett/100427-FellesuutalelseEngelsk.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010, p. 9, for a map and discussion of this.

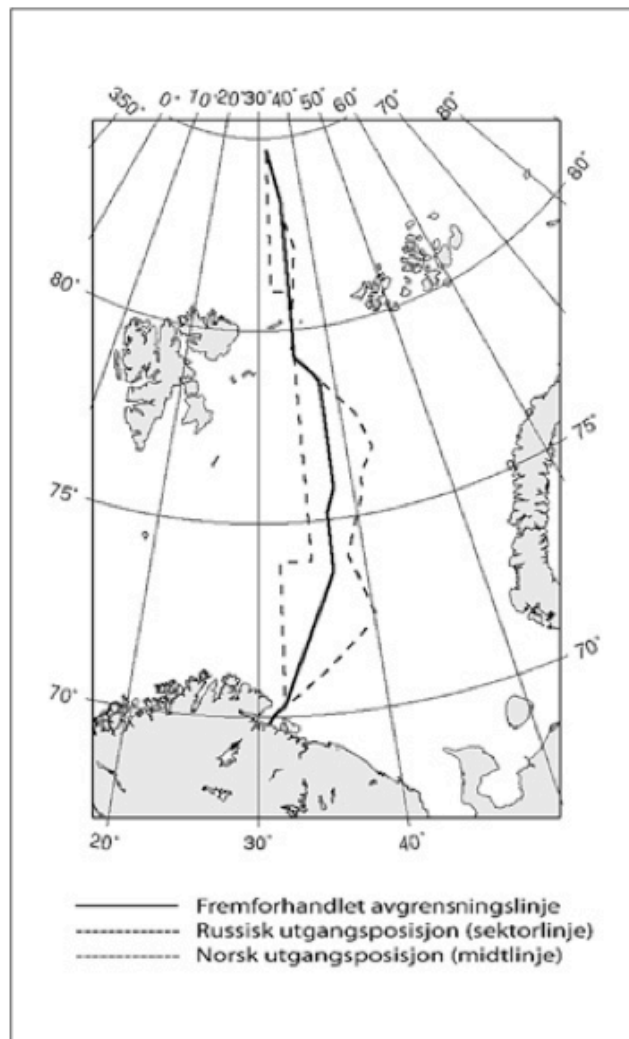


Figure 2: The boundary

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010.

The agreed boundary is based on geographical factors, not assumed natural resources. But, as indicated by its title, the agreement is not only a boundary agreement but also a cooperation agreement. It therefore takes a comprehensive approach, spelling out how cooperation on the management of living marine resources and petroleum resources is to be organized.

### **Fisheries**

The Barents Sea is an internationally significant fishing ground, with abundant stocks of a number of fish species and marine mammals. Four fish stocks are considered shared stocks between the two countries: cod, haddock, capelin and Greenland halibut. A number of other species are also harvested in the area, which is important also as a growth area for juvenile herring.<sup>12</sup> The centerpiece of the bilateral cooperation is a Joint Fisheries Commission which has operated since the mid-1970s (Hønneland, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Herring is not fished in the Barents Sea, however. One of the world's largest fisheries, the herring fishery takes place along the coast of Norway as well as in the EEZs of the Faroes and Iceland.

The preamble of the agreement specifically notes that Norway and Russia as coastal states have a fundamental interest in and responsibility for the conservation and sustainable management of the living marine resources in the Barents Sea and the Polar Ocean, in accordance with international law.

The provisions of article 4 of the agreement concern fisheries and takes as its point of departure that the agreement shall not harm the respective fishing possibilities of the two parties. It establishes that the fisheries cooperation between the two countries, as laid down in fisheries cooperation agreements from 1975<sup>13</sup> and 1976<sup>14</sup>, is to continue, maintaining the relative shares of the shared fish stocks. Also, in managing fisheries, a precautionary approach is to be taken to protect the living marine resources and the marine environment.

Details regarding this are stipulated in an appendix to the agreement. The 1975 and 1976 agreements are to remain in force another 15 years, and will thereafter remain in force for six year periods unless renounced by one of the parties.<sup>15</sup> The appendix also contains provisions on technical aspects of fisheries regulations and the work of the Joint Fisheries Commission.

### **Petroleum**

The Barents Sea is generally believed to contain substantial amounts of oil and gas. A much-quoted US Geological Survey study from 2008 (USGS, 2008) states the Arctic “accounts for about 13 percent of the undiscovered oil, 30 percent of the undiscovered natural gas, and 20 percent of the undiscovered natural gas liquids in the world. About 84 percent of the estimated resources are expected to occur offshore.”<sup>16</sup> In the study, the Barents Sea is identified as a region with substantial oil and gas reserves. Until now, however, very little commercial petroleum activity has taken place in the Barents Sea proper; the Snøhvit field off Finnmark county to the southwest of the Barents Sea, which came on stream in 2007, is the closest. The Goliat oil field in the same area is expected to come on stream in 2013. In Russia, great expectations are vested in the Shtokman field, 600 km to the north of Murmansk. This is expected to become one of the largest offshore gas fields in the world (Moe, 2010).

The agreement emphasizes in its preamble that petroleum resources are to be managed effectively. As the case is for fisheries, the agreement contains one article laying out the general provisions, and an appendix with the specifics. The point of the departure of article 5 on petroleum is that where a petroleum deposit straddles the boundary, the provisions in appendix II of the agreement, “Transboundary petroleum deposits”, apply. The essence here is that the management and utilization of such deposits are to be based on unitization agreements. The appendix specifies in detail the provisions such unitization agreements are to contain (article 1), and states that disagreements are to be promptly resolved and specifies procedures for that. Article

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<sup>13</sup> On the establishment of a Joint Fisheries Commission.

<sup>14</sup> On bilateral cooperation in fisheries management.

<sup>15</sup> It is common practice for such agreements to have a time frame and procedures for renewal and renouncement.

<sup>16</sup> “90 Billion Barrels of Oil and 1,670 Trillion Cubic Feet of Natural Gas Assessed in the Arctic”. USGS Press Release 23 July 2008. <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980>



5 of the agreement also states that exploitation of deposits straddling the boundary can only be initiated in accordance with the provisions of a unitization agreement.

These provisions build on the Norwegian experience with similar provisions in cooperative arrangements on management and utilization of transboundary petroleum deposits with other countries in the North Sea.

### **The wider significance of the agreement**

The agreement is important in several ways. It is an important contribution to the evolving international law of boundary delimitation, contributing to state practice in this field. Also, as pointed out above, it is politically significant at the global level in demonstrating that such disputes - of which there are some 400 globally (Anderson, 2006) - can be resolved in a peaceful manner. Some observers have predicted that unresolved boundary issues in the Arctic threaten the peace and stability in the region (Borgerson, 2008). But the general experience in the Arctic is that boundaries are settled in a peaceful manner, and in accordance with the provisions of international ocean law (Hoel, 2009). The case at hand here supports this view.

At a regional level, therefore the agreement first of all makes good on promises made by the coastal states to the Arctic Ocean in the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration,<sup>17</sup> resolving a boundary issue on the basis of international ocean law. Also, the agreement can provide an example for the resolution of similar issues between other countries in the Arctic and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

At the bilateral level the establishment of the boundary paves the way for petroleum development in the formerly disputed area of the Barents Sea. The day after the entry into force of the boundary agreement, on 8 July 2011, the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate initiated seismic surveys in the Norwegian part of the previously disputed area, an activity that will be continued in 2012.<sup>19</sup> As regards the fisheries cooperation, the boundary agreement is not likely to entail major changes and the existing arrangements will continue for the foreseeable future.

In recent years, Norway made substantial strides in settling undecided boundaries, entering into agreements with Denmark/Greenland on a boundary between Svalbard and Greenland (2006) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006), an agreement with the Faroes and Iceland on the future delimitation of the continental shelf in an area in the Norwegian Sea, and making its submission to the Continental Shelf Commission on its extended continental shelf (2006).

The agreement also sets the stage for extended scientific cooperation to address issues relating to integrated oceans management. Scientific cooperation between research institutions in the two countries in fisheries science goes back more than fifty years in time (Haug et al., 2007), and is embedded in the wider international cooperation in marine science in the International Council for the Exploration of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ilulissat Declaration. <http://arctic-council.org/filearchive/Ilulissat-declaration.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> The one major, outstanding bilateral marine boundary between two Arctic countries is in the Beaufort Sea between the US and Canada.

<sup>19</sup> 11,500 km were covered in 2011. <http://www.npd.no/no/Nyheter/Nyheter/2011/Seismikkinnsamling-i-Barentshavet-ost-avsluttet/> In the state budget for 2012, 80 million NOK is dedicated to suveys in the southeastern Barents Sea. <http://www.npd.no/no/Nyheter/Nyheter/2011/260-millionar-til-kunnskapsinnhenting-i-nord/>

Sea. The scientific cooperation has become increasingly ecosystem oriented, producing comprehensive joint reports on the status of the marine environment (Stiansen et al., 2009). While cooperation in fisheries management is well developed, and cooperation on issues relating to the marine environment is evolving, cooperation beyond the scientific aspects of integrated oceans management is complicated.

While Norway's sovereignty over the Svalbard archipelago, provided for by the 1920 Svalbard Treaty (Ulfstein, 1995), is not disputed, Russia has a different view than Norway on the exercise of the sovereignty (Pedersen, 2006). The boundary agreement states (article 6) that the agreement shall not prejudice rights and obligations under other international treaties to which both Norway and Russia are parties. The view has been raised, that the location of the agreed boundary to the east of the sector line can be read as a Russian acceptance that Svalbard "... can generate normal maritime zones, and that such zones are not prevented by the 1920 Svalbard Treaty" (Henriksen and Ulfstein 2010, 9).

At the domestic level, the importance of the agreement comes in two forms: Politically, the boundary agreement is significant in that it represents a major foreign policy success for the government. One of the most important foreign policy issues over the last decades, and *the* most important issue between Norway and Russia, is resolved. Economically, and in the longer term, the boundary agreement creates a more business friendly environment in the North, paving the way for increasing investments in petroleum-related activities in particular.

## **Conclusions**

The land boundary between Norway and Russia was agreed in 1896 (Nielsen, 2005, 7). 114 years later, also the marine boundary was settled. The area divided between the two coastal states corresponds to an area more than half the size of mainland Norway, rich in natural resources. In recent years the Norwegian government has been busy concluding marine boundaries, and the agreement with Russia represents the apex of these achievements.

In hindsight, it can be no great surprise that the boundary took time to negotiate. Prior to 1990, the Cold War did not provide a negotiating climate conducive to a resolution of the issue. At least as important, before the 2000s there was no need for an agreement (Kvalvik, 2004). Fisheries were well cared for with the existing fisheries regime that was established in the 1970s. However, with an increasing interest in petroleum development in the North in both countries, the need to agree on a boundary and develop associated agreements for how to cooperate on petroleum development became more imminent. Also, the increasing international interest in the Arctic provided a push towards a final resolution of the boundary.

The resulting agreement represents a comprehensive solution to all this, defining a bilateral boundary on the basis of international law, continuing a relatively successful fisheries cooperation, and establishing a regime for how shared petroleum deposits are to be managed. Beyond that, the agreement is also internationally significant in that it demonstrates that Arctic countries work together on the basis of international law, setting important precedence for how similar issues can be resolved.

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**Biography:**

Alf Håkon Hoel is a political scientist and regional director of the Institute of Marine Research in Norway. He has held previous positions at the University of Tromsø, the Norwegian Polar Institute, NORUT - Northern Research Institute, and the Fridtjof Nansen Institute. His teaching has mainly been in international relations and public policy. Hoel's research interests and publications focus on international relations in marine affairs, with an emphasis on the Arctic. Recent publications include articles on Arctic governance, ecosystem approaches to marine management in the Arctic and international fisheries management. Email: [alf.haakon.hoel@imr.no](mailto:alf.haakon.hoel@imr.no)

**Summary:**

More than three decades in the making, the 2010 agreement between Norway and Russia on a boundary in the Barents Sea establishes a boundary, continues cooperation in fisheries, and lays the framework for cooperation on petroleum deposits straddling the boundary. The importance of the boundary goes well beyond the Barents Sea, as it demonstrated the capability of Arctic countries to resolve issues in a peaceful manner on the basis of international law. The agreement settles the most important outstanding foreign policy issue between the two countries and opens up new opportunities for cooperation. The article gives a brief overview of the agreement, the its negotiation and its implications at various levels of governance.

**Key words:**

Boundary agreement, Barents Sea, Norway and Russia, Arctic