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THE UK'S, GERMAN AND FRENCH APPROACHES TO THE ARCTIC

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The non-Arctic countries have been present in the Arctic cooperation structures since their very beginning in the early 1990s. Due to their scientific credentials and expertise on polar regions three states, the United Kingdom, Germany and Poland, were invited to observe the launch of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991 and contributed, along with the Netherlands, to its implementation. On this basis these four countries 'inherited' their status as observers to the Arctic Council when it was formed in 1996, and were joined in this position by France in 2000.

The profile of the Arctic Council in its first decade of operation remained relatively low and the body focused primarily on compiling environmental information in circumpolar perspective, albeit with important political relevance. Presently, due to rising interconnectivity between the Arctic and other world's region, the AC attracts more attention as the issues it addresses grow in national, regional and global importance. One of the questions pertaining to this change is the role of Observers, or in broader terms, of non-Arctic actors in the governance system for Arctic region. The AC sought to address this point by elaborating on (quite strict) criteria for admission of new, as well as periodical review of old, Observers. This development, together with increasing interest of Asian powerhouses in the region, has taken over most of recent debates.

Yet, also among the 'old' observer states to the AC there has been a tendency to mark their interest in the region and set out their overall Arctic policies. Not only the United Kingdom and Germany were historically among the first AC observers, but they were also the first non-Arctic states to publish in 2013 their overall Arctic policies, with France expected to follow this trend in early 2015. All three states possess very significant scientific expertise, infrastructure and experience of operating in the region. They also have vast economic interests related to potential transport routes, hydrocarbon and mineral resources as well as fisheries in the opening Arctic Ocean, and internally the region has been drawing increasing attention of their public. With the United Kingdom taking more appeasing tone, both France and Germany have expressed in their public statements their dissatisfaction with a role currently assigned to Observers by members of the Arctic Council. Moreover, they raised questions, fundamental in perspective of the region's governance, with regard to UNCLOS as the instrument not necessarily resolving all issues related to the Arctic. Finally, they expressed their clear support for stronger engagement of the European Union in the region's matters. So how these countries see their roles in the Arctic? What are their interests and priorities? What is their potential for action in the Arctic? What does their action mean for the EU's Arctic policy? Finally, what does their stance mean for future Arctic governance? This presentation seeks to address these questions.