

ARCTIC POLITICS, THE LAW OF THE SEA AND RUSSIAN IDENTITY. THE BARENTS SEA DELIMITATION AGREEMENT IN RUSSIAN PUBLIC DEBATE. Geir Hønneland. 2014. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. ix + 121 p, hardcover, illustrated. ISBN 978-1-137-41405-2. £45.00.

A few days ago a book reached me that I have been looking forward to reading and reviewing for quite a while. I opened the package and there it was . . . And looked like a wonderful book of poetry or my grandmother's cookbook with a binding that reminded me of the wallpaper in a hotel in Murmansk where I stayed a while ago. Usually, as readers of my reviews may have noticed, I do not mention the artwork of a book, because in principle it really does not matter to me. It is after all the content that counts. But this book immediately made me smile and feel personally touched by it due to the way it looks, seemingly standing in contrast to its highly political content.

But a political analysis does not always need to be impersonal. Geir Hønneland once again shows in this book his unique capability of providing insight into highly complex contexts by providing an analysis that is rooted in his personal experiences. Similar to his analyses in *Making fishery agreements work* (Hønneland 2013) this one of the Russian perception of the 2010 Barents Sea delimitation agreement between Russia and Norway, which has been celebrated as a major success and as evidence for peaceful cooperation, is based on his personal experiences as a Coast Guard officer, Russian interpreter and researcher. The outcome is a short, personal and to some degree autobiographical book that provides the reader with information on, just to name a few, Barents Sea fisheries, the law of the sea, Russian *vis-à-vis* Norwegian media coverage of the Barents Sea agreement and Russian political processes. Having read and reviewed *Making fishery agreements work*, some of the information is indeed overlapping, for example Hønneland's description of the interaction between Norwegian Coast Guard officers and Russian fishermen (pages 19–29), but given Hønneland's lively, elaborate, yet personal style of writing it is nevertheless a lot of fun to read.

Hønneland provides an incredible amount of information that is relevant for scholars of many disciplines. For example, his brief history of the Svalbard Treaty or his rough, but informative summary of the history of the Barents Sea fisheries regime contain all relevant benchmark data, allowing for a contextualisation with the topic of the book. Without the information on Russia's history in Svalbard, for example, the Russian criticism towards the 2010 Barents Sea delimitation agreement would be much less clear. I would assume that political scientists and legal scholars alike could consider the information useful. Or for the latter, Hønneland's brief excursion to legal language in Russian and Norwegian legal prose: 'The Russians have predilection for minutiae, the Norwegians prefer brevity – and as simply phrased as possible with view to helping ordinary people understand legal complexities' (page 39). Comparative lawyers analysing Norwegian and Russian legal developments and/or implementation of transboundary legal agreements will find Hønneland touching upon legal language highly enlightening.

In chapter 3, *Russian reactions to the Barents Sea delimitation agreement*, Hønneland convincingly analyses the Russian media during the time of signing of the Barents Sea agreement

with regard to its consistency and fact-based depiction of Norwegian and Russian fisheries practices, history and politics. In essence, this chapter serves as a rebuttal of Russian media depictions and unveils the distortion of facts and contexts in order to highlight the alleged importance of withdrawing from the agreement in order to gain allegedly lost areas back. In Hønneland's words, 'the question then is not so much why, but *why on earth* these people harp relentlessly on about Putin having to retrieve the Barents Sea' (original emphasis; page 54).

The book also takes the foreign policy perspective into account, meaning Norwegian-Russian relations in a broader sense and in how far these affect or influence the fisheries management regime, which, as Hønneland shows, is considered a 'gentlemen's agreement' on the Russian side. In the chapter *Russia and the west – The foreign policy perspective* he shows how difficult cooperation between Norway and Russia can be, exemplified by Russian calls for, on the one hand, and criticism of, on the other, Norwegian aid with regard to environmental or health policies. Especially in this chapter, however, I noticed an elaborate tilt towards the pro-Norwegian side of the matter as Hønneland merely presents, and debunks, Russian depictions of Norway yet without really showing, and debunking, Norwegian depictions of Russia. But Hønneland underlines his professionalism in analysing data when he concedes: '[I]t is probably no accident that the arguments I have presented in this book generally support the official Norwegian version. I know how the Norwegian Coast Guard and fisheries bureaucracy work from the inside. [...] I may feel guilty of drawing as caricatured a picture of Russians [...] as Russians I contend draw of Norway and the Norwegians' (page 108).

After all, Hønneland's book is a very personal one and does not claim to be entirely objective and therefore data overlap is no coincidence: Apart from *Making fishery agreements work* (Hønneland 2013), also two interview excerpts that already occurred in *Borderland Russians* (Hønneland 2010: 52–55, 83–85) are reprinted in the chapter *Russia and the West – The everyday perspective* in order to complement the complex and diverse picture of Russian-Norwegian perception and interaction. In line with the contradicting foreign policy perspective on Norwegian aid, also this chapter shows from the perspective of inhabitants of the Barents Region, how stereotypical and simplistic, yet admirably, Norway and Norwegians are perceived.

Especially the latter two chapters allow Hønneland to draw a conclusion in the brief chapter *Looking up to the west* on why the criticism towards the agreement was so strong. Was it because of the oil industry? No, Hønneland concedes, because at the time there were much more easily accessible areas for exploitation. Was it because of the strong Russian fishing industry? Also this can be negated. Here Hønneland almost seems annoyed and writes: 'But I have said it before and will say it again. The demarcation line has nothing to do with the allocation of quotas in the Barents Sea. It has nothing to do with the status of the waters around Svalbard. It does not reduce Russian fishermen's opportunity to fish in Norwegian waters' (page 113). Was it then because of a Norwegian conspiracy in order to establish supremacy over the Arctic? Well . . . no. Russian opposition, best exemplified by Hønneland's adversary in this book, former Soviet fisheries minister and now prominent political commentator Vyacheslav Zilanov, can be explained by inner-Russian insecurities with

regards to its place in the international community in which Norway has become entangled. It is therefore more about 'the favoured story of Russia's place in the world. That is why Putin has to reclaim the Barents Sea' (page 116).

Once again Hønneland has made complex contexts understandable. This book is not a scientific one, but reads more like an expanded and analytical version of a diary. Like its cover that touched me personally right away, the book's contents touched me due to the wealth of information framed in such a personal manner. It goes without saying that *Arctic politics, the law of the sea and Russian identity* will serve as a work of reference in order to, to a certain degree, understand Russian identity

and politics. And especially for students of the Barents (Sea) Region this book is invaluable. (Nikolas Sellheim, Faculty of Law, University of Lapland, PO Box 122, 96101 Rovaniemi, Finland (nikolas.sellheim@ulapland.fi))

References

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