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Could the Arctic Be a New Field of Advocacy for Hungary?

Climate change is driving the discovery of more and more minerals hidden in the Arctic, for which the initial stage of the struggle is already underway. As this process intensifies, so the number of countries interested in the region is expanding. Hungary cannot be left out of this process, but the articulation of Hungarian interests is still in its infancy. The paper examines how the Arctic region is currently reflected in Hungarian strategic documents and how actual cooperation with the Arctic states is developing. Finally, the paper outlines the elements on which Hungarian interests and actions concerning the Arctic can be built in the future.

Keywords: Arctic region, Hungarian interests, strategy

1. Introduction

The Arctic is a region that has been significantly valorised in recent decades. Climate change is opening up new shipping routes and new economic opportunities that could bring significant strategic advantages to countries that are able to exploit them. Increasingly, states are engaging with the region which, at first glance, would find it difficult to see that it is worth investing resources and capital in their presence in the region. Among the European countries, Germany and France now have their own Arctic strategy,³ and states such as Mediterranean Spain and Italy, which have a particularly warm climate and are located in the Mediterranean, and Switzerland, which is located in the middle of the continent with no access to any sea, have also signed up as observers to the Arctic Council.

The question rightly arises as to whether Hungary, like Switzerland or Spain, should be concerned about the Arctic? The paper seeks to answer this question both

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³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development: *The Great Challenge of the Arctic. National Roadmap for the Arctic*. Paris, 2016; Federal Foreign Office: *Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines. Assume Responsibility, Seize Opportunities*. Berlin, 2013.

theoretically and through examples from today, and proposes the basic elements of a future Hungarian Arctic policy.

2. Hungarian strategic thinking about the North Pole

The analysis of strategies is based on the most up-to-date and valid Hungarian strategy documents in force, and limited to sectors such as foreign policy, security policy, energy policy and climate change. Climate change is of particular importance because it has become a key driver of the security and economic revaluation of the Arctic region, and the impact of environmental processes in the region is not limited to the region, but has global implications.

The first comprehensive strategy document is the *Hungarian Foreign Policy Strategy*, published in 2011. Although the strategy does not specifically mention the Arctic region, the third of its three priorities, global openness, could serve as a basis for future work on the Arctic.⁴ Although the focus of the strategy is on the post-Soviet space, Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Sahel and Latin America, the very fact that the third priority is to turn Hungarian foreign policy towards regions that have received little or no attention so far offers an opportunity to enhance the value of the Arctic for Hungarian foreign policy. All the more so as the strategy underlines that

"...global attention means our interest in issues that do not necessarily seem to affect our country directly, but are important in global terms and therefore gain in international importance. [...] At the same time, we must also be aware that, because of the increasingly interconnected and interdependent nature of world processes, issues that seem to affect us only marginally also have an impact on the circumstances whose development is a priority issue for our domestic development and the foreign policy that is intended to help it".⁵

The message of the strategy is therefore that Hungarian foreign policy must address regions of global importance even if they currently have little direct impact on the country. In addition, the need to monitor global changes in energy policy and geopolitics means that the current foreign policy strategy should already include the Arctic as a third foreign policy priority.

In 2020, the Hungarian Government published a new *National Security Strategy* (NSS), entitled *Hungary in a Changing World*. This strategy also does not attribute much importance to the region, but it is worth highlighting that it recognises the growing role of the Arctic in the great power competition: "The power competition is increasingly extending to the global commons: there is an increasing struggle for

⁴ The three main priorities of the strategy are: regional policy (Central and Southeastern Europe); Euro-Atlantic orientation (representation of national interests in the EU and NATO); global opening (highlighting relationships that have been pushed into the background or always lost in recent years). See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary: *Hungary's Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. 2011.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary (2011): op. cit. 36–37.

control of international waters and resources, the Arctic and outer space, and the dominance of cyberspace.”⁶

Interestingly, the 2012 *National Military Strategy* (NMS) is eerily similar in its approach to the global commons, except that it identifies international airspace as a global commons, but not the Arctic.⁷ In contrast, the 2021 NMS no longer includes global public goods as a concept and, like the 2012 strategy, does not address the Arctic, while cyberspace and space will play a larger role than in its 2012 predecessor.⁸

The relationship between the Arctic region and Hungary is given the greatest weight in the *Second National Climate Change Strategy 2018–2030, looking ahead to 2050* published by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology in 2018.⁹ The aim of this very long, 251-page strategy is to prepare the country for the challenges posed by climate change. It takes stock of how this process will affect different sectors and then sets out proposals and objectives for the short, medium and long term.

In relation to the Arctic melt, it addresses the issue in the section on “Climate Change Security Implications for Hungary”, stating that “[a]n immediate risk factor is that Hungary could become a destination or transit country for global climate migration from the sea areas flooded by melting Arctic ice caps, as well as from prolonged heat waves, droughts and severe water and food shortages in the Middle East, North Africa and possibly the Mediterranean countries”.¹⁰ The strategy sets out two long-term lines of action for the security sector. The first is the full integration of climate change into national security policy, and the second is “preparing to prevent and counter direct or indirect economic, political or even armed attacks to control natural resources, in particular drinking water and land”.¹¹

All this suggests that strategies that address the challenges of the present pay little attention to the region, preferring to see it as an issue for the future. This may be due to the fact that strategies such as the NSS or NMS accepted for 5 to 10 years expect the challenges facing the region to become relevant only after 2030. The 2018 strategy, however, is a clear sign that the long-term security policy implications for the region are already being recognised in Hungary, as well.

This is already clearly visible in political manifestations at senior management level. In 2017, Péter Sziijártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, participated in the Arctic Frontier Conference at the invitation of the Norwegian Foreign Minister Børge Brende. In his speech he spoke about the relationship between the Arctic and the European Union (EU) and the future role of the region. He made several arguments in support of his presence. Hungary has recently been granted observer status in the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), and the minister humorously mentioned the Austro–Hungarian Empire’s colonialism in the region, which, although not a real argument in this case, is Hungary’s oldest and most important historical relationship

⁶ 1163/2020 (IV. 21.) Government Resolution on the National Security Strategy of Hungary. Point no. 148.

⁷ Ministry of Defence: Hungary’s National Military Strategy. 2012. 10.

⁸ 1393/2021 (VI. 24.) Government Resolution on the National Military Strategy of Hungary.

⁹ Ministry for Innovation and Technology: 23/2018 (X. 31.) Parliamentary Resolution on the Second National Climate Change Strategy 2018–2030, looking ahead to 2050.

¹⁰ Ministry for Innovation and Technology (2018): op. cit. 160.

¹¹ Ministry for Innovation and Technology (2018): op. cit. 187.

with the Arctic. Furthermore, he argued that the biggest challenges of European integration, energy security, security in general and EU–Russia relations all appear in the Arctic, and therefore the European Union and Hungary want to contribute to a long-term Arctic strategy.

In his speech, concerning Hungary's position on the Arctic, he also stated that a balance must be struck between environment, economy, energy and competitiveness. Not enough attention is paid to the fact that the largest hydrocarbon reserves are located in the Arctic, but the current peaceful period of recovery should be used to prepare for the coming hydrocarbon discoveries and exploration by establishing international regulations for the Arctic. After all, an expanding population and economic growth will mean that Arctic energy resources will come to the fore.¹²

Minister Péter Szijjártó attended the conference again in 2018, this time at the invitation of the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Terje Søviknes, Norwegian Minister of Petroleum and Energy.¹³ At this conference, he again began his speech by explaining why a representative from a country so far from the Arctic was holding a speech. Among the reasons he gave was that what is happening in the Arctic has a global impact, which affects Europe in particular. He then identified three factors that have a strong influence on the development of Hungarian policy and which are also closely linked to the Arctic. He stressed that Hungary has one of the world's largest water resources, including thermal and drinking water, and therefore water management is one of the flagships of Hungarian industry. This makes the country particularly vulnerable to global events affecting sea level change, which can contribute to drinking water shortages. The second aspect is migration, which is predicted to create humanitarian and security challenges in the coming decades due to climate change, in addition to political debates. The third aspect is the economy. Hungary is a very open economy, heavily dependent on foreign direct investment and exports, but a balance needs to be struck between competitiveness and environmental protection. The Foreign Minister then highlighted three areas where Hungary can contribute to the EU and Norway's Arctic policy:

- increasing the use of nuclear energy in electricity generation from 43% to 65% and reducing emissions
- supporting the production and purchase of electric cars in the automotive sector through financial instruments, innovation and research and development
- participation in the Arctic Frontier forum year after year

The Hungarian minister explained the third point in detail. The Arctic has become an integral part of global politics, and is a good example of how major conflicts can only be resolved through dialogue, with the participation of all parties concerned.¹⁴

It is clear from the two ministerial speeches that, in the Foreign Minister's interpretation, the relationship between Hungary and the Arctic has economic and geopolitical dimensions, and indirectly, Hungary's membership of the EU also means

¹² Arctic Frontiers: Arctic Frontiers 2017 The Arctic in a Global Context. *YouTube*, 25 January 2017.

¹³ Ábrahám Vass: Hungarian Oil Company MOL expands further in Norway. *Hungary Today*, 24 January 2018.

¹⁴ Arctic Frontiers: Arctic Frontiers Policy 2018. Speaking Truth to Power. Science Based Policy in a Post-Fact World. *YouTube*, 15 June 2018.

that the region needs to be addressed. It is no less important to note that Hungary has a strong position on the international regime governing Arctic resources, and supports and considers it necessary. These aspects point to strategic interests, all the more so since they have been channelled into the political discourse at ministerial level.

3. The Hungarian Arctic presence

In the light of the above, it is perhaps not so surprising that Hungary cooperates with Arctic states in a number of areas. One such state is Sweden. In 2001, the Hungarian Government signed a contract for the lease of 14 Gripen fighters, making Hungary the third country after Sweden and the Czech Republic to have systematically deployed Gripen C/D variants.¹⁵ This cooperation has been so successful that the two countries signed an agreement in 2022 to upgrade the fighter aircraft fleet with the MS20 Block 2 capability, which will be delivered by SAAB. This upgrade will expand both the combat and communications capability of the Gripen and the range of weapons that can be integrated on the fighters.¹⁶ Another meeting point in the Arctic regarding the Gripen is that pilot training will continue in Canada, as part of NATO's Canadian Air Training Programme. The first phase of the Canadian training, which was successfully completed by 95 Hungarian pilots between 2002 and 2018,¹⁷ will begin in Hungary on Zlin-242 aircraft, followed by a Canadian training course lasting at least two years. Those who successfully complete the Canadian training will be assigned to Gripen after a retraining period in Sweden.¹⁸

A further result of the Swedish–Hungarian cooperation is that in 2019 it was decided that Hungary will put into service the Swedish SAAB Bofors Dynamics Carl Gustaf M4 recoilless rifle. The order is worth USD 55 million and delivery will take place between 2019 and 2024.¹⁹ Finally, another Swedish company, Volvo, has also been involved in the modernisation of the Hungarian Defence Forces. The first prototype of the Currus Aries bus, produced in Gödöllő, was built on the Volvo B7R chassis in 2013, and from 2017 Volvo has also supplied the Euro6 engine and many other components for the buses.²⁰ In 2019, the last of the 100 buses ordered was handed over to the Army.²¹ (Hungary also came into contact with the Norwegian defence industry when it decided to procure the Norwegian–American NASAMS air defence system in 2020.)²²

¹⁵ Saab: Gripen roars over Hungary for 15 years. *Saab*, 30 March 2021.

¹⁶ Saab: Saab to Deliver Upgrade for Hungarian Gripen Fleet. *Saab*, 12 January 2022.

¹⁷ Only five people were unable to complete the training.

¹⁸ Sándor Galambos: A Griff hangja. *Honvéd*, 8 (2022). 36–45; Gábor Baranyai: Kanadában képezik a Honvédség pilótáit. *Magyar Nemzet*, 24 August 2019.

¹⁹ KaliberInfo: 55 millió dollárért vesz Carl Gustaf M4-eseket a Magyar Honvédség. *KaliberInfo*, 08 January 2019.

²⁰ István Dániel Ott: A Currus Aries 01 többfunkciós moduláris jármű kifejlesztése és feladatai a magyar haderőben I. rész. *Haditechnika*, 54, no. 4 (2020). 58–62; István Dániel Ott: A Currus Aries 01 többfunkciós moduláris jármű kifejlesztése és feladatai a magyar haderőben III. rész. *Haditechnika*, 54, no. 6 (2020). 58–63.

²¹ Gábor Kámánfi: Átadták a századik honvédségi Currus Aries buszt. *Honvédelem*, 28 November 2019.

²² 85% of the purchase price (HUF 130 billion) is covered by an export credit provided by Export Credit Norway (ECN) and the Norwegian Export Credit Guarantee Agency (GIEK). See Mfor.hu: Haderő-fejlesztés Magyarországon: 130 milliárdos hitelt kapunk hozzá. *Mfor.hu*, 17 March 2021.

In addition, Sweden is the second largest contributor of hours to the Pápai International Heavy Airlift Regiment, with 550 hours²³ and the other three Arctic states, together with the Arctic states of the United States, Finland and Norway, account for 65.2% of the regiment's flying hours,²⁴ which also means that these Arctic states contribute a large share of the costs.²⁵

From a NATO perspective, it is worth mentioning the Arctic exercises in which Hungary is also participating. In the 2018 Trident Juncture exercise, which involved 50,000 troops, 15 soldiers from the Hungarian Material Supply Depot Base took part, and their task – in cooperation with German soldiers – was to install a field fuel depot and operate it as part of the theatre fuel supply system.²⁶ Hungary also participated in the 35,000-strong Cold Response 2022 exercise in March–April 2022, which was notable for the fact that not all NATO member states were present (only 23), but Norway was also among the participants.²⁷

In the context of the Hungarian presence, it is also important to highlight the expansion of Hungarian Oil and Gas Plc (MOL Group, hereinafter referred to as "MOL") in Norway. In 2015, MOL successfully completed the previously announced acquisition of 100% of Ithaca Petroleum Norge ("IPN") from Ithaca Petroleum Ltd., which is now operating under the name MOL Norge. According to the statement, the transaction includes more than 600 million barrels of unrisk-weighted geological assets, mostly oil, which will double the MOL Group's exploration portfolio. Commenting on the acquisition, Alexander Dodds, Managing Director of Exploration Production, said: "Norway will be a key exploration hub for the MOL Group in the future, helping us to achieve our goal of becoming a marine operator in the North Sea."²⁸ However, it is also important to note that MOL sold its stakes in two wells in April 2022.²⁹ Although the specific drilling areas do not fall within the Arctic, they are quite close to the Arctic border in an Arctic state. At the same time, MOL had an Arctic interest in Russia, but the 100%-owned Matyushinsky block in Western Siberia was sold in 2016.³⁰ In addition to the investment, the parties also agreed to support each other's efforts within the UN, and Hungary in particular will support Norway's candidacy for non-permanent Security Council membership in the 2021–2022 term. Norway has successfully won this membership. In 2017, the two countries agreed to cooperate in the field of health care, whereby Norwegian patients will be treated in Hungary, and Hungary plans to increase agricultural exports to Norway.³¹ In the energy sector, Hungary has also entered into strategic partnerships with ExxonMobil, a Texas-based

²³ Swedish Armed Forces: Hungary (HAW). s. a.

²⁴ USA 32%, Sweden 17.4%, Norway 12.6%, Finland 3.2%.

²⁵ Strategic Airlift Capability: The Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC). s. a.

²⁶ Melinda Hovány-Pap – István Háda: Eredményesen zárult a Trident Juncture 2018 gyakorlat. *Honvédelem*, 05 December 2018.

²⁷ Astri Edvardsen: Cold Response 2022: 35,000 Soldiers from 26 Countries in Northern Military Exercise. *High North News*, 18 January 2022.

²⁸ MOL Group: A MOL sikeresen lezárta az Ithaca Petroleum Norge megvásárlását. 09 July 2015.

²⁹ Melisa Cavcic: Norwegian Player Seeks Operatorship as MOL Norge Offloads Two North Sea Discoveries. *Offshore Energy*, 18 April 2022.

³⁰ MOL Group: Annual Report 2016. 39.

³¹ MTI: Hungary Seeks Closer Ties with Northern Europe, Says Foreign Minister in Norway. *Daily News Hungary*, 25 January 2017.

company that is one of the largest players in Arctic gas and oil exploration, alongside several Swedish, Finnish and Canadian companies.³²

In the context of Arctic sea routes, the *Hungarian port of Trieste* should be highlighted, as its acquisition was an important aspect of supporting the competitiveness of Hungarian exports.³³ The advantage of the port is its geographical proximity compared to Europe's largest ports: while Rotterdam or Piraeus are around 1,500 km from Budapest, Trieste is only 500 km away. This is important mainly because land transport is orders of magnitude more expensive than sea transport. It is also worth noting that between 2005 and 2019, container traffic in Trieste tripled, so this is presumably an investment that can pay off in the long term.³⁴

The port acquisition in 2019 will mainly serve to connect Europe to China via Italy (as well as to facilitate access to the Arab parts of Africa and the Middle East). The One Belt One Road Initiative,³⁵ which will connect Europe to China, aims to reach Europe via two planned routes.³⁶ One is the Northern Sea Route, the other is mainly over land and through the Mediterranean. Furthermore, taking into account the Budapest–Belgrade railway line that will be part of it, this also means that Hungary has a counter-interest in this respect in the development of the Northern Sea Route, which bypasses Hungary – although presumably this route will be faster and cheaper to transport under the circumstances.

Another area of cooperation with the Arctic states is *research cooperation*. In 2021, Hungary signed a Memorandum of Understanding on space cooperation with Finland. The agreement creates opportunities for cooperation between companies and higher education institutions in the development of space research, Earth observation and vehicle navigation technologies.³⁷ In 2022, Hungary signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Russia to continue the bilateral cooperation in space exploration that started in 1999. Three major Hungarian–Russian space research programs have been launched in the last three years, involving Russian and Hungarian research institutes, universities and companies.³⁸

There is little attention paid to the Arctic among Hungarian researchers, and no Hungarian has ever undertaken a full expedition to the Arctic. However, given that the climatic conditions are similar to Antarctica and that some Arctic Council observer states (e.g. Spain, India) have used their Antarctic activities as an argument to legitimise their Arctic presence or as a strategy to link the two regions, the Hungarian presence in the Antarctic is worth investigating.³⁹ Krisztina Kovalcsikné Bátori and

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary: *Stratégiai partnerségi megállapodások*. s. a.

³³ András Kovács: Szijjártó Péter a triezti kikötőről: Ezzel Magyarország erősödik. *Origo*, 26 July 2019.

³⁴ Agrárszektor: Jó ötlet-e a triezti magyar kikötő? *Agrárszektor.hu*, 24 July 2019.

³⁵ Xi originally announced the strategy as the "Silk Road Economic Belt" during an official visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. Nowadays it is called Belt and Road Initiative (B&B or BRI).

³⁶ Jana Robinson: Arctic Space Challenge for NATO Emerging from China's Economic and Financial Assertiveness. *Transforming Joint Air and Space Power. The Journal of the JAPCC*, 30 (2020). 35–40.

³⁷ Government of Hungary: Magyarország és Finnország úripari együttműködéséről állapodott meg. *Magyarország Kormánya*, 14 September 2021.

³⁸ Ferenc Kovács: Aláírták a magyar–orosz űregyezményt. *Index*, 12 February 2022; Ferenc Horvai: Harmincéves kapcsolataink az Európai Űrügynökséggel. *Aero Magazin*, 17 September 2021.

³⁹ Rajesh Gawande: India's Engagement with Arctic Council. December 2016; Arctic Council: *Spain – Observer Report 2020*.

Zoltán Ács were the first to reach the South Pole in 2004, but they only completed the last stage of 11 km. They also made it to the North Pole, but here they travelled to the 87th parallel by helicopter.⁴⁰ In 2019, Gábor Rakonczay became the first Hungarian to walk the 917 km distance between Antarctica and the South Pole.⁴¹

Hungarian research activity in the Antarctic goes back a long way. The exploration of the region by Hungarians began with an astronomical expedition in 1874, and many Hungarian explorers have subsequently visited Antarctica.⁴² After the regime change, the most significant Hungarian research started in 1998 on King George Island on the edge of Antarctica, and by 2003 it had evolved into the first fully Hungarian research expedition, called the “Frozen Oasis” Research and Film Expedition. The ice-free areas at the Antarctic margin are very sensitive to short-term environmental changes and are therefore ideal for studying climate change. The Hungarian researchers then returned to the site in 2005 to investigate how the processes shaping the ice-free areas on the surface have changed over the past two years and the rate at which the topography is changing.⁴³ From the Hungarian perspective, the importance of the research was justified by the fact that the study of the Arctic climate and the movement of Antarctic ice can help to understand the archaeogeography of the Carpathians and their development during the Ice Age.⁴⁴ Due to lack of funding, the expedition was not supported by ministries or academia. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences also supported the expedition only on a technical level.⁴⁵ According to one of the participants, Sándor Fira, “we had to admit that Hungarian Antarctic research does not yet feature prominently among the concrete goals of Hungarian science”.⁴⁶ However, the 2005 expedition⁴⁷ was supported by the Zoltán Magyar Postdoctoral Fellowship of the “Foundation for Hungarian Higher Education and Research”, the Department of Natural Geography of Eötvös Loránd University, the Geographical Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Geochemical Research Laboratory of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Collegium Budapest – Institute for Advanced Study. Other collaborating partners were the Korean Ocean Research and Development Institute⁴⁸ and the Chilean Antarctic Institute.⁴⁹

Zsófia Jurányi, a physicist working on the optical properties of aerosols, studied the relationship between aerosol particles and climate change at the German Neumayer III station from December 2016 to February 2018, also at the German Alfred Wegener Institute.⁵⁰ Finally, in 2021, the MTA–ELTE Theoretical Physics Research Group and MTA–MTM–ELTE Paleontology Research Group, part of the Eötvös Loránd Research

⁴⁰ Index: Magyarok elsőként a Déli-sarkon. *Index*, 16 January 2005; HVG: Két magyar hegymászó is elérte az Északi-sarkot. *HVG*, 20 April 2004.

⁴¹ Sándor Joób: Első magyarként elérte a Déli-sarkot Rakonczay Gábor. *Index*, 08 January 2019.

⁴² Kele František – László Fekete: *Jég és föld között. Az Antarktisz (újra)felfedezése*. Dunaszerdahely, Nap Kiadó, 2003. 131.

⁴³ Origo: Újra magyar kutatók az Antarktison. *Origo*, 10 February 2005.

⁴⁴ Sándor Fiar – Balázs Nagy: *Olvadó jövő*. Budapest, General Press Kiadó, 2004. 26.

⁴⁵ Fiar–Nagy (2004): op. cit. 9, 11.

⁴⁶ Fiar–Nagy (2004): op. cit. 11.

⁴⁷ Fagyos Óázis Kutatócsoport: Hungarian Scientific Program 2005. *Antarctica.hu*, 2005.

⁴⁸ Korean Ocean Research and Development Institute, KORDI.

⁴⁹ Instituto Antártico Chileno, INACH.

⁵⁰ Attila Károly Nagy: Két hónapos jó éjszakát kíván az Antarktison áttelelő magyar kutató. *Index*, 20 May 2017.

Network (ELKH), and the Konkoly Thege Miklós Institute of Astronomy of the ELKH Centre for Astronomy and Earth Sciences (CSFK), the ELKH Institute of Geophysics and Space Science (FI) and the Department of General and Applied Geology of ELTE, investigated the adequacy of the widely accepted textbook explanation of the so-called Eocene-Oligocene transition.⁵¹ It is therefore fair to say that over the past twenty years, the importance of Arctic research has greatly increased, with the most prestigious universities and research institutes now taking part.

4. Conclusions based on Hungarian strategies and practice

Based on all these strategic documents and actual practice, we can say that there is a Hungarian presence in the Arctic and that specific Hungarian interests can be identified. These are as follows:

Direct Hungarian interests:

- further increasing economic ties in a spirit of global openness, with a focus on the defence and energy sectors
- participation in the management of Arctic warming as a factor affecting Hungary, because:
 - environmental change reinforces migration
 - from a geopolitical point of view, it increases the country's vulnerability to freshwater supplies and increases the potential for conflict in the Arctic
 - it could be economically disadvantageous because it opens up a route between Europe and China that bypasses Hungary
- supporting dialogue between the major powers in the region, involving all stakeholders
- support for comprehensive international regulation of hydrocarbon exploitation in the region

Indirect Hungarian interests:

- the growing presence of NATO makes it necessary to prepare the Hungarian Defence Forces for these special climatic conditions, so participation in these military exercises is among the national interest
- the European Union also supports the presence in the region with significant resources and programs, participation in which can help to promote direct interests

However, the problem is that the current Hungarian strategy documents do not address the region, or address it only to a limited extent, and Hungary does not have an independent Arctic strategy. A further handicap is that the Hungarian defence industry is not yet present in the region, but this may be due to the fact that industrial capacities are still being built up. In the future, however, the region could become a target for the Hungarian industry, as in other countries. Finally, the fact that Hungary

⁵¹ MTI: Magyar kutatók megfajították, hogyan jegesedhetett el az Antarktisz. *Origo*, 07 October 2021.

does not have observer status in any regional international organisation is also a major constraint. The latter is a possibility that deserves further discussion.

4.1. Arctic Council as an untapped Hungarian opportunity

International cooperation in the region has seen a significant upsurge since the end of the Cold War, with more than a dozen regional organisations now operating in the region. Their activities cover virtually everything from environmental protection to economics and research. It would therefore greatly facilitate the promotion of the interests already identified if Hungary, following the example of many other non-Arctic states, were to acquire observer status in the organisations best suited to its interests. Although Russia's membership in the largest regional organisations has either been suspended or boycotted by other states (Arctic Council, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Nordic Council)⁵² due to the Russian–Ukrainian war, this should not be interpreted as a permanent breakdown of Arctic cooperation. After the 2014 crisis, there was also some decline in Arctic cooperation, but after a few years, the previous level of cooperation was restored and further progress was made. This was interrupted by the current, much more serious situation, so it is expected that this recovery will take more time, but this is unlikely to have an impact on a possible Hungarian observer status.

The most important regional organisation in the region is the Arctic Council, founded in 1996 by eight states,⁵³ which have coined the term “Arctic state” for themselves.⁵⁴ From Hungary's perspective, the most important are the powers of the observer states. Although this status does not imply decision-making competence, as decision-making at all levels of the Council is the exclusive competence of the eight Arctic states (with the involvement of the permanent participants), observer status does give the right to participate in Council meetings and working groups. In the Council's subsidiary bodies,⁵⁵ observers may speak, make written statements, submit relevant documents and express their views on issues under discussion.⁵⁶

Considering that the effects of climate change are most visible in the Arctic, which Hungary considers a long-term security threat, Council participation can contribute to obtaining relevant information for the threat assessment. In addition, an important aspect is the establishment of new informal contacts and the fact that, since a large part of the observer states' time in the Council is spent in working groups, where observers can provide financial, technical and other contributions to programs of interest to the Arctic states, the Arctic states will accept the observer state. For many non-Arctic states, becoming an observer is also a recognition of

⁵² Atle Staalesen: Nordic Countries Halt All Regional Cooperation with Russia. *Eye on the Arctic*, 07 March 2022; Gloria Dickie: Russian Officials Call Arctic Council Boycott 'Regrettable'. *Reuters*, 04 March 2022.

⁵³ The founding countries are Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Sweden and the United States. In addition to the eight member countries, the organisation has six indigenous permanent participating organisations.

⁵⁴ Arctic Council: Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council. Joint Communique of the Governments of the Arctic Countries on the Establishment of the Arctic Council. Ottawa, 1996.

⁵⁵ Working Groups, Task Forces, Expert Groups and other bodies set up by the Arctic Council.

⁵⁶ Arctic Council: Arctic Council Observers. s. a.

their Arctic interests and their right to assert them.⁵⁷ Considering that most of the Hungarian interests identified in the previous section are directly or indirectly related to climate change, this is even more true from a Hungarian perspective, given that a significant part of the Arctic Council's work is devoted to climate change research, environmental protection and the use of sea routes.

Based on interviews⁵⁸ on the Arctic Council's website, "Observer Reports"⁵⁹ submitted to the Arctic Council and other publicly available sources (e.g. reports from public institutions or statements from politicians),⁶⁰ most observer states legitimise their participation in the organisation by the impacts of climate change. Legitimacy may be based on participation in climate change research, but also on the historical link with the region (the Netherlands) or on the protection of economic interests (Italy, the U.K. and Spain). Many states refer to having an independent Arctic strategy (France, Germany, Italy, China, Switzerland and South Korea) or highlight the number of research programs or conferences they have participated in or organised.

4.2. Elements of the special Hungarian campaign – proposal to obtain observer status

Taking the above into account, a special Hungarian campaign can be set up to obtain Hungarian observer status. The main building blocks of this are outlined as follows:

- In the context of *historical argumentation*, while there is minimal Hungarian presence in the last hundred years, the aforementioned Austro–Hungarian "colony" may be a central element of this argumentation.⁶¹
- While there is no significant Hungarian minority in most of the Arctic States, the *Hungarian diaspora* in Sweden is estimated at 27,000,⁶² 348,000 in Canada in the 2016 census, and 1,348,198 in the United States (although only 1,764 of

⁵⁷ Liz Bowman: Observers to the Arctic Council and Their Benefits. *The Polar Connection*, 27 July 2017.

⁵⁸ Arctic Council: Interview with Arctic Council Observers: The Netherlands, Japan, United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Spain, Switzerland. Arctic Council, 2020.

⁵⁹ Michael Däumer: Germany's 2016 Observer Review Report. *Arctic Council*, 31 May 2016; Arctic Council: *Germany – Observer Review 2021*. Arctic Council: *France – Observer Report 2020*; Didier Ortolland – Olivia Bellemer: France's 2016 Observer Activities Report. *Arctic Council*, 01 December 2016; Francesco Puccio: Italy's 2016 Observer Activities Report. *Arctic Council*, 24 November 2016; Kazuko Shiraishi: Japan's 2016 Observer Activities Report. *Arctic Council*, 16 December 2016; Arctic Council: *Japan – Observer Report 2020*; Arctic Council: *Netherlands – Observer Review 2021*; Yang Xiaoning: China's 2016 Observer Activities Report. *Arctic Council*, 01 December 2016; Linlin Li: The People's Republic of China 2018 Observer Review Report. *Arctic Council*, February 2019; Galen Lee: Singapore's 2016 Observer Activities Report. *Arctic Council*, 01 December 2016; Arctic Council: *Republic of Singapore – Observer Report 2020*; Arctic Council: *Republic of India – Observer Report 2020*.

⁶⁰ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères: Strengthening Our Cooperation to Achieve Our Common Goals. *12th Ministerial Meeting of the Arctic Council – Observer Statement*, 20 May 2021; Federal Foreign Office (2013): op. cit.; Sam Tan: What Is the Connection between Singapore and the Arctic Region? *Today*, 24 May 2016; Tae-yul Cho: 2nd Vice Minister's Opening Remarks at the Seoul International Arctic Symposium. *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 11 April 2013.

⁶¹ The expedition had a Hungarian supporter in the person of Count Ödön Zichy, and there was also a Hungarian participant, Dr. Gyula Kepes, a doctor on board. See Tamás M. Tarján: A Ferenc József-föld felfedezése. *Rubicon*, 30 August 1873.

⁶² The number of Hungarians in diaspora: Denmark – 5,170, Finland – 2,248, Norway – 8,316, Russia – 2,781. See Krisztián Rákóczi et al.: *Nemzetpolitika*. Budapest, Dialóg Campus, 2017. 37.

- them live in Alaska).⁶³ Even if we only include Alaska, there are approximately 400,000 Hungarians living in the Arctic states. On the one hand, this could be an argument for observer status in the Arctic Council, but on the other hand, it is another reason why more attention should be paid to the region.
- The impact of *climate change* on Hungary is also a compelling reason given that the vulnerability of Hungarian water resources to sea level rise makes the country particularly interested in combating climate change. Similar reasoning can be observed for Singapore and the Netherlands, which are also particularly vulnerable to sea level change due to their specific geographical conditions.
 - The active involvement prior to the application could be given less emphasis, as there is not much of a Hungarian presence in the Arctic, but the *participation in the Arctic Frontier conference* in 2017 and 2018 mentioned above can be highlighted.
 - Hungary has *research cooperation* with several Arctic states, which is worth highlighting. Although not Arctic, but Antarctic research, Arctic research has a long history in the country, and there is still significant Arctic and climate change research going on in the present. In this context, it would be worthwhile to emphasise space research and space cooperation with Finland and Russia, as there are already international examples of space research being highlighted in relation to the Arctic.
 - *Economic interests* can also be discussed, most notably in relation to MOL Norge, but the assertion of such interests would be legitimate after the observer status has been granted, rather than being the basis of the Hungarian argument – especially given the explicit emphasis on environmental protection in the organisation.
 - Finally, a unique element of this Hungarian campaign could be to emphasise the *Finnish–Hungarian linguistic affinity*. Hungary's closest linguistic relative is Finland, and no other observer country has such an argument or similar ones, which could provide additional legitimacy.

Taking these shortcomings into account, Hungary may be able to develop a legitimate and serious set of arguments to justify its claim to observer status. And the idea is not unrealistic, as countries further south than Hungary and similarly lacking a sea exit have already campaigned successfully.

5. Conclusions

In the shadow of the crises of recent years, the Arctic has received little attention. However, challenges such as climate change, population growth and energy scarcity face a long future, and this foreshadows a growing role for the Arctic. In the long term, this could certainly justify the creation of an independent Hungarian Arctic strategy,

⁶³ 2020: ACS 5-year Estimated Detailed Table (B04006 – People Reporting Ancestry). *United States Census Bureau*, 2020.

but in the meantime, it would be necessary to define the country's interests and goals in other strategies. This is also supported by the fact that Hungary cooperates with most Arctic states in the fields of economics, research and the military industry. On this basis, Hungary, as a European state, may (or should) soon embark on the path towards the Arctic.

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