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CENTER for DIPLOMATIC AFFAIRS and POLITICAL STUDIES

EMERGING STRATEGIC AREAS: ARCTIC

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Dr. Eda AYAYDIN
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02 April 2024 | DIPAM YouTube Channel
[Panel Notes](#)

The first webinar of the **Emerging Strategic Areas: New Competitions, New Threats** series, with the theme of the Arctic, hosted by the Center for Diplomatic Relations and Political Studies (DIPAM), took place online on April 2, 2024, at 13:00.

Moderated by **Dr. Tolga SAKMAN**, Chairman of DIPAM, the webinar featured **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ebru CAYMAZ** (Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University), **Dr. Eda AYAYDIN** (University of London, Institute in Paris), and **Dr. Adnan DAL** (Hatay Mustafa Kemal University) as speakers.

The topics and discussions highlighted during the webinar are as follows:

The webinar commenced with **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ebru CAYMAZ**'s presentation on "Türkiye's Polar Science Diplomacy." Firstly, the distinction between the terms 'High North' and 'Arctic' was emphasized, indicating that the High North encompasses a broader area, including certain parts of Siberia. The fundamental paradigms shaping the High North were identified as climate change, natural resources, and geopolitical competition. While the primary focus of scientific inquiry was climate change, it was noted that this topic is interconnected with the other two. Scientific research serves as a cornerstone for legitimizing activities in the region.

From the perspective of the United States, there are seven fundamental headings that shape the Arctic region: climate, commodities, trade, connectivity, peoples, cooperation, and competition. Scientific research primarily focuses on climate and peoples.

CAYMAZ elaborated on the history of Türkiye's Polar Research. It was emphasized that there have been Arctic studies conducted by Turks in the past. These studies trace back to the Ottoman Parliament in 1912-1913. Significant efforts related to the polar regions were also undertaken during the founding period of Türkiye, and other studies were closely monitored. Institutions such as the Meteorological Institute, Naval Forces, and Cartographers Association showed interest in the Arctic region.

Multinational and interdisciplinary scientific cooperation programs focusing on the characteristic features that distinguish polar regions from others, such

as the International Polar Years, were also discussed. So far, a total of 4 International Polar Years have been organized. The first Polar Year took place between 1882-1883, during which the Ottoman Empire could not participate due to the Ottoman-Russian War. Subsequent International Polar Years were held in 1932-1933, 1957-1958, and 2007-2009. Türkiye participated in the last three Polar Years, with the widest participation occurring in 2007-2009, where one of the workshops was held in Türkiye. It is projected that the fifth Polar Year will take place between 2032-2033.

The importance of Polar Years lies not only in their scientific research missions but also in their function as a means for states to legitimize their activities. Additionally, the increasingly observable adverse effects of climate change on a global scale are becoming prominent. Furthermore, the concept of science diplomacy is crucial in this context. Within the framework of science diplomacy, a process is employed to balance a state's national interests with common interests for the benefit of everyone worldwide.

There are three key concepts that distinguish science diplomacy from other international endeavors: political will, diplomatic engagement, and state support. Moreover, science diplomacy serves three primary purposes: providing scientific advice to achieve goals in diplomacy, promoting international scientific collaborations, and enhancing relations between states through scientific collaborations.

The emergence of polar science diplomacy, a new concept, is attributed to views that draw upon International Polar Years, the Antarctic Treaty System, and the Arctic

Council. The underlying idea of the Second Polar Year (1932-1933) was the potential of observations in the polar regions to provide explanations for phenomena worldwide. Within this scope, 27 stations were established in the Arctic region, and 5 magnetic stations were set up around the equator. Türkiye contributed to this effort with the Türkiye Meteorological Observations in 1932 and the bulletin on precipitation distribution in the same year. The Third Polar Year saw increased participation from Türkiye. This year is also known as the geophysical year as it was led by geophysicists. Not only high latitudes but also tropical and temperate regions were included in the studies. When examining research areas, it can be seen that polar lights, night sky brightness, cosmic rays, geomagnetism, glaciology, gravity, ionospheric physics, longitude and latitude determinations, meteorology, oceanography, upper atmosphere research, seismology, and solar activities were included. Additionally, the World Data Center was established during the Third Polar Year. Türkiye participated with two projects themed on nuclear radiation and solar activity observations.

The Fourth Polar Year (2007-2009) is known as the most comprehensive polar year to date. It encompassed six scientific themes: state, change, global connections, new frontiers, observation point, and human dimension. Due to archival issues in Türkiye, there is no clear information available in Turkish sources regarding Türkiye's contributions during this period. Typically, information about Türkiye has been accessed from the archives of the United Kingdom. This polar year involved the participation of more than 50,000 individuals. For the first time, a human dimension was added to a polar year in

scientific terms, highlighting the rise of social sciences. Türkiye actively participated in the HERMES (Hotspot Ecosystem Research on Margins of European Seas) project. Türkiye is known to have compared the seas in the High North with the Black Sea comparatively. Additionally, the Black Sea Observation Network was established. The 9th WMO Scientific Conference on Weather Modification & Workshop was held in Antalya. Five main themes and 57 subtopics with a focus on human aspects have been identified for the Fifth Polar Year scheduled for 2032-2033.

In studies related to the High North, the level of activity and publication varies for each institution. However, it is observed that the United States consistently ranks first. It was noted that the United Kingdom, which is not located in the Arctic region, ranks fourth. Moreover, countries engage in bilateral cooperation; partnerships such as the UK-Russia and Iceland-Canada collaborations are significant. It was emphasized that non-Arctic countries often rank high in these partnerships.

The Arctic region is home to more than 4 million people and comprises over 40 ethnic groups, including Turkish groups such as the Yakuts and Tuvans.

While there were 5,000 studies related to the Arctic in the 1990s, by 2015, an average of 11,000 scientific studies were conducted annually. This is a significant number and indicates the establishment of research infrastructure.

The importance of supporting studies targeting indigenous peoples was underscored. Although institutional structures have been established in

Türkiye, support and concrete steps from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are needed. It was emphasized that Türkiye's efforts to advance economic relations should also be supported politically.

In the second part of the webinar, **Dr. Eda AYAYDIN** addressed the topic titled "Arctic Geopolitics in Crisis Context: Climate Change, Ukraine War, and International Cooperation." The following topics were discussed:

Initially, the distinction between classical geopolitics and geopolitics discussed in the Arctic region was highlighted. AYAYDIN, discussing classical geopolitics through the phrase "Geography is destiny," emphasized the statement of Yves Lacoste, a prominent figure in critical geopolitics, that "Geography is the place where wars are waged." In other words, how geography is defined determines its subsequent use. Therefore, the importance of discourse was emphasized here. The influence of discourse is significant in the increasing importance of Arctic geopolitics. It is observed that a conflict regarding the Arctic started around 2010. In 2013, Michel Rocard, former Prime Minister of France and subsequently Arctic Ambassador, used the term "the second Middle East" to describe the Arctic region. In other words, she claimed that there are abundant resources in the Arctic, and therefore, there would be unrest and conflict in the future. In 2019, China declared the Silk Road, and subsequently, the Arctic attracted more attention. However, authors in the region have refuted the developing literature since 2010 and emphasized that the Arctic region has a history before the climate crisis.

From a critical perspective, the question "Which Arctic are we talking about?"

comes to the forefront. There is not just one Arctic; there are many different regions such as European Arctic, American Arctic, Russian Arctic, and each has its own dynamics. The timeframe we are talking about is also important. There are many different turning points such as pre-2007, the 2013 Russian annexation of Crimea, and post-2022 Russia-Ukraine War. Climate change is just one of the changes in the region and does not represent the birth of the region. Even the definition of the Arctic Circle is a topic of debate. Each country has different political interests, and consequently, the definition of the Arctic also varies.

Classical geopoliticians emphasize the undiscovered 30% gas and 13% oil reserves. AYAYDIN emphasized that these resources are already within the continental shelf of the five countries in the Arctic region. Furthermore, she pointed out that these five states are open to cooperation, and therefore, conflict is not considered likely. The increasing importance of new sea routes is influenced by many factors.

Cooperation is shaped under different identities because there are eight Arctic states, thirteen observer states, and de facto the European Union regarding this issue. These eight states have positively continued cooperation until 2022, and have even introduced the concept of 'Arctic Exceptionalism.' Some of the thirteen observer states are active, while others are not.

The establishment of a unit to increase the visibility of the Sami people, Europe's indigenous population, and the celebration of "Sami Week" every November have been considered as indicators of their growing recognition and importance

internationally. The questioning of the role of Sami people by a French journalist in the European Parliament elections has demonstrated the group's presence in political and social matters.

Dr. Eda AYAYDIN stated that the Law of the Sea Convention serves as a constitution for the Arctic Ocean, emphasizing that the ability of this convention to delineate maritime boundaries does not imply the absence of other governance mechanisms in the region. According to AYAYDIN, there is a multi-layered and compartmentalized governance system in the Arctic Ocean, which prevents external interventions and prevents the formation of conflicts in the region. Additionally, she noted that climate change is intensively studied in the Arctic and that the Arctic Council has conducted significant work in this regard.

As of February 2022, it was announced that the functions of the Council were suspended following the Ukraine invasion. The Council, starting to work without Russia in June 2022, stated that it would continue scientific projects with Russia in October 2023. A decision was made to sustain bilateral relations with Russia, which stated that it would not pay dues to the Arctic Council, through visual technology methods.

Türkiye applied for observer membership in the Arctic Council in 2015 but was not accepted due to the current context of the Council. Eda AYAYDIN believes that reapplying for observer membership would be beneficial for Türkiye, considering its status as a maritime country and its potential to strengthen its position as a "green superpower."

In the third part of the webinar, **Dr. Adnan DAL** will present on "Rethinking Arctic Security: From Cooperative Security to NATO-Russia Antagonism and the Loss of the Rovaniemi Spirit in the Arctic," where he will assess Arctic security. In his presentation, he mentioned that the period between 1945 and 1970 was dominated by strategic competition, which transitioned into a period of cooperation practices with the onset of the Detente Era in the 1970s. Dr. DAL highlighted that the term "Arctic Age" began to be used starting from 1985 and Mikhail Gorbachev played a significant role in moving Arctic politics towards cooperation. He pointed out that events such as Russia planting a flag in the Arctic Ocean in 2007, the annexation of Crimea, intervention in Georgia, and the Russia-Ukraine War that began in 2022 have led to increased sanctions against Russia and initiated Russia's process of being marginalized in the Arctic. During this period, he noted an increase in polarization in Arctic politics. Additionally, he mentioned that the Arctic region is rich in energy resources and significant work has been conducted on energy security in the area since 2008.

Regarding maritime law, five countries have signed the Illulissat Declaration, which has been significant for cooperative practices.

Between 2007 and 2012, record levels of ice melting in the Arctic Ocean increased the region's accessibility, exemplified by China's first commercial ship passage. In 2013, China's observer status in the Arctic Council highlighted the international process of non-Arctic countries becoming active in the region. Crises in the Suez and Panama Canals have raised the importance of Arctic politics. The policies of major

powers in the Arctic, including Russia, China, and the USA, have been addressed. Russia views the Northern Sea route as its internal waters due to geographical advantages, while the USA has focused on climate change concerns during Obama's term and continues to prioritize climate change under Biden's administration. NATO's recognition of climate change as a threat and the importance of cooperation with Canada and Denmark have been emphasized. China has been involved in Arctic politics for commercial reasons since the early 20th century, actively participating in Arctic politics after the 2010s, striving to be recognized as a near-Arctic state by publishing a "White Paper" in 2018, and attempting to engage in Arctic politics through cooperation with Russia.

The regional cooperation process that began in the 1990s has led to a re-interpretation of geopolitics in the Arctic and the emergence of various security threats beyond traditional security elements. Issues such as climate change, the use of natural resources, sovereignty problems, and the use of sea routes have marked a period where cooperation and governance have become important. During this period, examples of cooperation in areas such as nuclear safety, pollution, and environmental protection were seen, and the importance of non-state actors like the Arctic Council has increased. DAL stated that the cooperation processes have dominated Arctic politics after the 1990s and mentioned that the cooperation process is closely related to governance issues because a period has been entered where non-state actors emerge in the face of certain problems in the Arctic, highlighting the Arctic Council established in 1996 as an example of these actors. He emphasized the importance of coordination and interaction among

actors. Consequently, the establishment of the Arctic Council has made cooperation permanent. DAL explained the concept of "Arctic Exceptionalism" as a region where hot conflicts do not occur. The Arctic has been considered an exceptional region for a long time, but the perception has been criticized following the invasion of Ukraine and the NATO memberships of Finland and Sweden. Attention has been drawn to NATO's tendency to increase its military presence in the Arctic. It was stated that Türkiye has not played an active role in this region and that its contributions have mostly remained at a commercial level. The importance of diplomatic activities has been underlined, but it has been emphasized that these activities should be conducted at the state level.

After the presentations, the session moved to the **Question&Answer** section. Moderator Tolga SAKMAN asked about the status of efforts against climate change and the prevention of glacier melting at a regional level.

Ebru CAYMAZ emphasized the necessity of global participation in the fight against climate change and mentioned that the UK has conducted 10,000 studies related to climate. She stated that these studies represent a significant scientific milestone within the framework of resource competition but expressed her concerns about the lack of measures based on the results of these studies.

Adnan DAL, taking the floor, mentioned that despite the rhetoric on taking measures against climate change, the use of fossil fuels is still ongoing, highlighting this contradiction. He stated that there is no way to prevent this, and it remains an open issue.

Eda AYAYDIN mentioned that, from a global perspective, raising awareness and cooperation in combating climate change is important. She noted that along with governments, representation is given to local communities, and regionally, the collaboration among the Nordic people in the Arctic is commendable. She shared that they have taken national measures and provided examples.

SAKMAN highlighted the deployment of significant nuclear weapons in the Arctic and the harbors there hosting considerable nuclear capacity. He reminded of comments that Sweden and Finland's NATO membership would create a corridor bringing security to Europe's Arctic region. He inquired about the impact of this perspective on the region.

AYAYDIN stated that the European Union was established in an environment where there were no security concerns, but lately, security has been discussed more frequently. It was expressed that Arctic cooperation does not allow for conflicts; however, it was emphasized that Russia's war has negatively affected both Arctic cooperation and Europe. It was mentioned that the war is actually in Europe and it's desired to keep the conflict in the region; the Arctic people do not want Russia to come to the area. It was stated that nuclear weapons located on the Kola Peninsula owned by Russia are not seen as a direct threat by the West, as this armament is against any threat in the Arctic for Russia's security.

SAKMAN asked if the capacity hosted by Kola is being depoliticized as a risk. Eda AYAYDIN highlighted the policy of perception, noting that Norway's Foreign Affairs does not see Russia's armament as

a threat, hence they themselves are not arming. Adnan DAL suggested considering it from Denmark's perspective, stating that a NATO base there could create a security dilemma and that we might see its forefront in the coming years.

Ebru CAYMAZ mentioned, "Norway, being Russia's neighbor, finds it normal for Russia to host weapons to continue its existence, stating they will continue to maintain a balance policy as long as it is not directed at us."

SAKMAN, recalling discussions related to ethnic groups in the region, inquired whether the social perspective was emphasized.

Ebru CAYMAZ stated that these ethnic groups have gained a voice and representation rights on a regional scale.

Eda AYAYDIN discussed the Sami in Norway, who won a lawsuit against a wind turbine park infringing on their living areas, but the state ignored the court's decision. This situation is incredible for Norway, known for its democracy. Also, the Arctic Council ceased cooperation with Russia without consulting the indigenous peoples, even though they are the Council's permanent members, highlighting this dilemma.

SAKMAN reminded that Eda AYAYDIN stated it's difficult for conflicts to arise in the region due to its structure and asked whether the status quo can be maintained in a context where surrounding countries, countries emphasizing regional policies, and those valuing presence in the region exist.

Adnan DAL indicated that states in Arctic politics will consider their economic development priorities, suggesting that cooperation will continue based on economic foundations.

Eda AYAYDIN agreed with DAL, stating that armed conflict benefits no one and disagreed with a trajectory towards war.

SAKMAN asked, “Can’t we predict that a small conflict in the region would quickly spread?” Eda AYAYDIN acknowledged that a minor military conflict could escalate but mentioned there are many mechanisms in place to prevent this, asserting these mechanisms act as a brake to prevent major conflicts.

Ebru CAYMAZ noted that Russia wouldn’t want war in that region.

Finally, Eda AYADIN emphasized the importance of Türkiye establishing a Science Attaché to support Arctic studies and called for action on this matter.



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