

# BACKGROUND REPORT

PRAGUE PRAŽSKÝ  
STUDENT STUDENTSKÝ  
SUMMIT



**NATO**

**The Arctic Issue**





## 1. Introduction

The dispute concerning the ownership of the Arctic region, generally called as the Arctic issue, has become one of the most crucial and controversial topics not just within the negotiations of the North Atlantic Alliance. For each of the eight states, Canada, Denmark<sup>1</sup>, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States (hereinafter referred to as the Arctic states), is the ownership of the area and of the natural resources located therein, a matter of strategic importance and the possible power struggle could endanger the long-lasting cooperation between involved states. Nowadays, the main goal of all involved states is to handle the issue peacefully and not to confront each other, to ensure the stability, prosperity and security in the Arctic and that comes hand in hand with promoting cooperation in the field of monitoring and protection of the region.

## 2. Status quo

The Arctic area consists of an ocean, part of it is permanently or seasonally frozen, and the land around – including Greenland and northern parts of Alaska, Russia, Canada and Norway<sup>2</sup>. The Arctic is rich in natural resources and due to the rapid warming it is increasingly accessible, as the amount of ice is on its historical minimum. The area has been inhabited for thousands of years by indigenous people as well. These are above all the Inuits and other numerous tribes. Therefore, it is not just the environment, but also the livelihoods of all the local inhabitants and the indigenous people that are potentially endangered by the climate change and by the exploration of the natural resources itself.

Historically it held a major security interest of the United States and of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, due to the possibility of fast crossovers of strategic bombers and nuclear submarines through this area<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, after the end of the Cold War, dissolution of the Soviet Union and other more urgent issues, the importance of the Arctic diminished with time. More than fifteen years later, the Arctic issue became a real global topic and got into the spotlight of the press once again when in summer 2007 Russian explorers placed a flag onto the seabed, approximately 4200m right below the North Pole<sup>4</sup>. This move was considered as a territorial claim of the Arctic territory; namely the spokesman for Russian Arctic and Antarctic Institute, Sergei Balyasnikov, describes the aim of the mission is “*like putting a flag on the Moon*”<sup>5</sup>. Although it has just declarative character and holds no legal title, such political moves could undermine the main goal of all involved states: the stability and prosperity in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Representing the autonomous country of Denmark.

<sup>2</sup> Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. Arctic: Location and Geography. In: *Polar Discovery* [online]. 2006 [accessed 2012-08-16]. Available at: <<http://polardiscovery.whoi.edu/arctic/geography.html>>.

<sup>3</sup> CONLEY, Heather – KRAUT, Jamie. *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Arctic: An Assessment of Current Challenges and New Opportunities for Cooperation*. Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010. 28p.

<sup>4</sup> Russia plants flag under the N Pole. In: *BBC News*. [online]. August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 [accessed 2012-08-06]; available at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6927395.stm>>.

<sup>5</sup> Russia plants flag under the N Pole. In: *BBC News*. [online]. August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 [accessed 2012-08-06]; available at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6927395.stm>>.



1: Arctic Area<sup>6</sup>



According to the international law, no country currently owns the whole Arctic area and, moreover, not one has the right to claim it. This is declared in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that provides a legal background to the ownership of the Arctic as well as other international waters: "*The States Parties to this Convention, ... desiring ... that the area of the seabed and ocean floor and the subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, as well as its resources, are the common heritage of mankind, the exploration and exploitation of which shall be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole, irrespective of the geographical location of States*".<sup>7</sup>

However, the Arctic territory is going through a massive change because of the global warming; therefore the debate on the ownership will most probably develop further as well. The limits of the continental shelves are set to 200 nautical miles (approximately 370 km); therefore a significant part of the Arctic Ocean remains independent from any state<sup>8</sup>. According to the UNCLOS, states which ratified the treaty are given ten years in order to express their claims to establish outer limits of continental shelves beyond the baseline of

<sup>6</sup> Source: <<http://www.athropolis.com/graphics/arcticmap-circle.gif>>.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea [online]. December 10, 1982 [accessed 2012-07-30]; Available at: <[http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)>.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea [online]. December 10, 1982 [accessed 2012-07-30]; Available at: <[http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf)>.



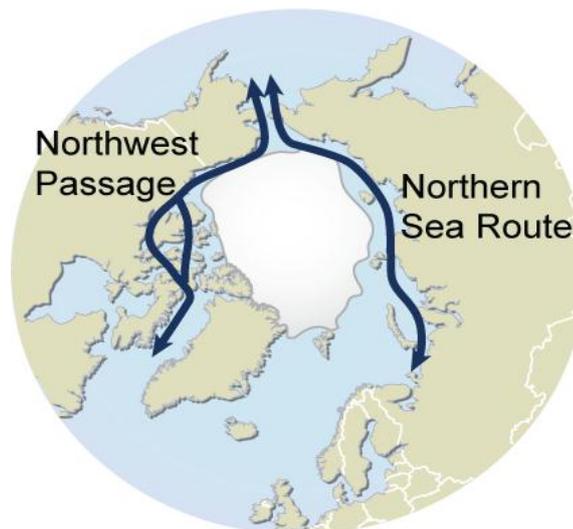
200 nautical miles by means of submission to UN Commission on Limits of the Continental Shelf. This applies for the five states fronting the Arctic Ocean: Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and United States<sup>9</sup>. However, the fact is that the Arctic belongs for the time being to everyone and no one at the same time.

### 2.1. The revenues

There are many reasons why the area of the Arctic Circle has an obvious potential that is discussed so much nowadays. One of the main reasons is its strategic position, since it is surrounded by three continents – America, Asia and Europe. The area is very rich in sizeable natural resources, such as oil and nature gas or, for example, copper, uranium, nickel, iron, etc. It is supposed that significant percentage of reserves of oil and gas are located in the area as well.

Secondly, new possible sea transportation routes between Europe and Asia, the Northwest Passage and the Northern sea route (see picture below) could be economically viable; however, for the time being the two most important waterways through Arctic are just seasonally approachable.<sup>10</sup>

Picture 2: Arctic routes<sup>11</sup>



### 2.2. Local organisations, Arctic Council

The Arctic council is a high-level intergovernmental forum, which consists of eight Arctic states, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States. It was founded in 1996, during the meeting of representatives of the governments in Ottawa, Canada. The purpose of foundation of such organisation is further development of

<sup>9</sup> The years of expiration of the possibility of submission: Canada (2013), Denmark (2014), Norway (2016; already submitted), Russia (2007; already submitted). The U.S. has not ratified the treaty, therefore the date remains undetermined.

<sup>10</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. Arctic Ocean. In: *CIA – The World Factbook* [online]. November 17th 2011. [accessed 2012-07-31]. Available at: <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xq.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> Source: <<http://neven1.typepad.com/.a/6a0133f03a1e37970b0133f17e08e8970b-800wi>>.



"cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic states"<sup>12</sup>. Decisions within this Council must be adopted unanimously by all the eight member states. The main focus should remain on those issues that have no relation to military security<sup>13</sup>. The Arctic council is designed as the main body to govern the Arctic region, nevertheless not the only one. Significant part of issues may be solved on bilateral basis between involved states, whereas some of them have just a small minority of their territory located in the Arctic Circle or no territory at all, therefore Iceland, Finland and Sweden are often omitted when it comes to decision process.

The fact that only five member states of the Arctic Council (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the U.S.) are actually fronting the area, led to establishment of a new, more substantial body by the five mentioned states. "A kind of Arctic G-5 with ambitious plans for overseeing polar oil and mineral exploration, maritime security, transportation and environmental regulation".<sup>14</sup> The one and only conference of this forum took place from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008 in Ilulissat, Greenland.

### 2.3. NATO

When it comes to the High North, four out of five states of "Arctic G-5" are members and the NATO simply cannot afford to overlook the issue or be completely ambivalent. What is alarming is that in either the 2010 Strategic Concept or 2012 Chicago summit declaration is the Arctic issue mentioned<sup>15</sup>.

Discussion about the Arctic has also been the standard topic within the NATO-Russia Council, where both sides agreed on joint approach to any security challenge in the region. A seminar on prospective in Arctic was held in 2009<sup>16</sup>, nevertheless the Arctic states that are members of NATO as well should push a summit on the Arctic issue, as it has not been given enough attention yet.

The main problem is the lack of consensus within the Alliance, concerning determination of the role that NATO should play in the issue. While Norway and Denmark support bigger involvement of the Alliance, Canada is not that fond of letting it closer. At the 2010 Lisbon summit, NATO declared its own position in the issue to be "a force projector and deterrent to instead assuming burdens of monitoring sustainable development and political stability without linking it explicitly to security"<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Arctic Council, Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council [online]. September 19, 1996 [accessed 2012-07-04]; Available at: <<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about/documents/file/13-ottawa-declaration>>.

<sup>13</sup> Arctic Council, Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council [online]. September 19, 1996 [accessed 2012-07-04]; Available at: <<http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about/documents/file/13-ottawa-declaration>>.

<sup>14</sup> Canwest News Service. Conference should mark start of Arctic power struggle. In: *Canada.com* [online]. c2010-2012, May 8th 2008, [accessed at 2012-08-01]; Available at:

<<http://www.canada.com/topics/news/world/story.html?id=d0135cd8-c15a-48a3-9579-0df5f8e185c1>>

<sup>15</sup> COFFEY, Luke: *NATO in the Arctic: Challenges and Opportunities* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/06/nato-in-the-arctic-challenges-and-opportunities#>>.

<sup>16</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation: *NATO discusses security prospects in the High North* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_49745.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_49745.htm?selectedLocale=en)>.

<sup>17</sup> LINDBERG, Martin: *Is NATO taking over the Arctic?* [online]. August 22, 2012 [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <<http://isnblog.ethz.ch/international-relations/is-nato-taking-over-the-arctic>>.



### 3. Interests of the Arctic G-5

#### 3.1. Canada

Canada has, side by side with Russia, expressed its territorial claim in a very clear and loud voice. The country has invested extensively in its Arctic defence and security capabilities and put the issue high on the governmental agenda. Nevertheless, Canada is willing to prove its title on the ownership without any sort of involvement of NATO. There are worries inside the government that, if NATO have been involved, it would secure the participation on the decision-making process to the non-Arctic member countries.<sup>18</sup>

Technically, around 40% of Canadian territory is in the Arctic area; however, majority of Canadians live far from the real north. Also, activity in the region is limited to various forms of monitoring and military exercises on annual basis and that only in summer, as the area is inaccessible during other seasons. Canada is, as well as other coastal states, above all concerned about the Lomonosov ridge (sub-sea mountain range which is approximately 1800km long), which is claimed to be a part of Canadian seabed. However, due to obstruction and lack of unanimous statement of the UN as well as scientists and other concerned parties about its connection to any continent, this dispute remains unresolved. Secondly, there is a dispute between Canada and the United States concerning the Beaufort Sea and the Northwest Passage, where Canada considers the area to be its own internal waters and, accordingly, claim the access and the right to monitor the area. Nevertheless, nowadays there is a lack of arguments justifying the Canadian claim on the region beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone.

#### 3.2. Denmark and Greenland

Denmark itself is not located in the Arctic area; however, since the colonisation it has been representing Greenland, nowadays its autonomous territory. Nevertheless, Greenland is aiming to gain independence from Denmark eventually<sup>19</sup>. Greenland itself has the nearest coastline to the North Pole and also takes part in dispute concerning Lomonosov ridge, which it claims to be just an extension to the territory. Due to climate warming, new resources of diamonds, zinc, silver, oil, natural gas and others are now approachable as well.

Military forces of the United States are present in the territory; at the Cold war base in Thule, which was supposed to monitor any Soviet movement towards America. The base is still there and it presents an important component of NATO's early reaction system. Concerning the development of the situation in the Arctic, Denmark belongs to the supporters of NATO's involvement.

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<sup>18</sup> COFFEY, Luke: *NATO in the Arctic: Challenges and Opportunities* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/06/nato-in-the-arctic-challenges-and-opportunities#>>.

<sup>19</sup> The Telegraph: *Greenland takes step toward independence from Denmark* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greenland/5594140/Greenland-takes-step-toward-independence-from-Denmark.html#>>.



### 3.3. Norway

Norway could be considered the most successful and active country when it comes to claims in the Arctic. It is the only country being permanently present beyond the boundaries of Arctic Circle. The Arctic issue is currently at the top of Norwegian domestic and international policy agenda<sup>20</sup>. Norway is most probably the greatest supporter of NATO's role in the Arctic region and has itself invested in Arctic defence capabilities that remain Norwegian major military focus as well.<sup>21</sup>

Starting in 1920 with the Paris Treaty, where Norway claimed the territory of Svalbard (formerly Spitzbergen) in the Barents Sea, the country has been very strict in pursuing its interest. The 1978 Grey zone Agreement was, as well, a compromise-based treaty with Russia resolving their dispute about the "Grey zone" between the Norwegian archipelago and the Russian islands "Novaya Zemlya" and the Franz Josef Land, which developed deeper cooperation between these two states. However, in 2006 it succeeded even in claiming parts of seabed of the Arctic Ocean, Norwegian and Barents Sea.

### 3.4. Russian federation

Russia was the first country to claim the Arctic territory in a very unusual way - in 2007 during operation Arktika, led by Russian polar explorer Arthur Chilingarov, where a Russian flag was put underneath the North Pole. This move was considered to be inappropriate by majority of countries and had no legal objective –an already famous quote of Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Peter Mackay, describes it as follows: ""Look, this isn't the 15<sup>th</sup> century. You can't go around the world and plant flags and say, 'We're claiming this territory' "<sup>22</sup>. The claim itself would bring Russia about 460 000 square miles of new territory. Russia is one of the key players in the mentioned dispute over the Lomonosov Ridge and Barents Sea as well.

Cooperation between Russia and NATO in the region itself has been almost smooth so far. Above all, Norway and Russia carried out military exercises together; most recently it was the Northern Eagle in 2012. However, alarming news appeared saying that Russia tends to militarise the Arctic region to up to the Cold War level<sup>23</sup>.

### 3.5. United States of America

The United States are in a position of Arctic power, therefore they should push the issue up on the Alliance's agenda and cooperate more with its strategic partner in the Arctic issue, Canada. Nevertheless, apart from joint exercises, e.g. participation in the Norwegian Cold Response, the U.S. has not been active enough in the region. Objective of White House

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Norway: *The High North – Visions and Strategies North* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <[http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/campaigns/the-high-north/high\\_north\\_visions\\_strategies.html?id=663591](http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/campaigns/the-high-north/high_north_visions_strategies.html?id=663591)>.

<sup>21</sup> COFFEY, Luke: *NATO in the Arctic: Challenges and Opportunities* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/06/nato-in-the-arctic-challenges-and-opportunities#>>.

<sup>22</sup> Russia plants flag under the N Pole. In: *BBC News*. [online]. August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 [accessed 2012-08-06]; available at <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6927395.stm>>.

<sup>23</sup> COFFEY, Luke: *NATO in the Arctic: Challenges and Opportunities* [online]. [accessed 2012-09-20]. Available at: <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/06/nato-in-the-arctic-challenges-and-opportunities#>>.



should be promotion of cooperation among member states of the Alliance, for example by means of realization of a summit on the Arctic issue, together with Russian Federation.

Oil production of the U.S. alone is at historically lowest rate, therefore, the U.S. are highly dependent on import, which accounts for almost 55% of their yearly consumption<sup>24</sup>. With the potential Trans-Alaska-Pipeline, the USA gained more independence towards Middle East. Main problem concerning the participation of United States in the Arctic is that the U.S. government has not ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea yet. If the U.S. claimed the entitlement, size of the gained territory would hardly be half the size of Alaska. But without ratification, there is a possibility that the United States will be deterred from claiming the Arctic area and the move could undermine the effectiveness of the treaty.

#### 4. Third party involvement

Regardless to participation in the Arctic council, which includes for example cooperation in monitoring and research in the region, the policies of Iceland, Finland and Sweden are not that strictly defined and their interaction is not that developed as it is between the "G-5" Arctic States. Their participation in the region remains limited due to their geographic location and their main focus concerning the issue depends on circumpolar cooperation, not on territorial claims.

Picture 3: Russia and Arctic<sup>25</sup>



What shall not be overlooked is the participation of Asian countries, such as China and Japan. No matter how big their distance from the Arctic Circle is, China, Japan and North Korea hold the status of Ad-hoc observer states. Both North Korea and China have requested

<sup>24</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. Arctic Ocean. In: *CIA – The World Factbook* [online]. November 17th 2011. [accessed 2012-07-31]. Available at: <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/xq.html>>.

<sup>25</sup>Source: <[http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/44032000/gif/44032849\\_arctic\\_russia416.gif](http://newsimg.bbc.co.uk/media/images/44032000/gif/44032849_arctic_russia416.gif)>.



in 2009 a Permanent observer status and thereby expressed their desire to not be omitted in the area. These were, however, rejected.

## 5. Conclusion

Only one thing is known for sure now – the Arctic Circle will be a subject of many further discussions. The situation can transform into ongoing cooperation system or into confrontation between the countries. In legal terms, significant part of the territory does not belong to any state. Will the international community be able to ignore the existence of natural revenues, which could be needed one day, and for how long? The known supplies of non-renewable resources, such as oil and natural gas, cannot keep track with worldwide demand forever. Or will Arctic superpowers continue following the peaceful track, set in many moves through the last decade?

But even apart from the territorial issue, there are still other questions. The exploitation of the resources inevitably endangers livelihoods of the inhabitants of the region. This puts two major interests into conflict: protection of environment on one side, the welfare of population and economic development of particular countries on another. A respect to indigenous population is needed in order to make the most of their knowledge and experiences in the region.

We can say that the development up to these days is just a beginning of the debate about this issue. And as it is considered to be a fact that the Arctic environment changes very rapidly, NATO needs to get more active and respond to the changes in order not to be left behind.

## 5. Timeline

Between 1903-1906	The Northwest Passage was navigated through for the first time by an explorer named Roald Amundsen.
December 10, 1982	The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, that defined the rights and responsibilities of states when using the world's oceans and their heritage, was signed.
Since 1991	After the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union, character of the international relations changed.
November 16, 1994	The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea came into force.
September 19, 1996	The Ottawa Declaration, founding document of the Arctic Council, was signed by the eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, United States).
December 20, 2001	The Russian Federation claimed an extension of its Exclusive Economic Zone beyond the limit of 200 nautical miles, but not extension of the Russian Arctic Zone by means of official submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. This



proposal was not rejected, however, further research was recommended.

- November 27, 2006 The Kingdom of Norway made an official submission to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in order to extend its seabed territory to parts of Barents and Norwegian Sea and the Western Nansen Basin in the Arctic Ocean.
- August 3, 2007 Russian Explorers led by Artur Chilingarov planted their homeland's flag 4200 m onto the seabed below the North Pole. This motion was considered to be controversial by whole world, especially by the states involved in the Arctic dispute.
- May 27-29, 2008 The Ilulissat Conference, meeting of the so-called "Arctic G-5" took place in Ilulissat, Greenland. The outcome of this Arctic conference was the Ilulissat Declaration, which was signed by Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States and furthermore defined their cooperation in the region.
- January 28-28, 2009 The Seminar on Security Prospects in the High North took place in Reykjavik, Iceland.
- August 20, 2009 The Moratorium on commercial fishing of the Beaufort Sea was signed by the United States and Canada that protects the natural environment in the region, as there is no widespread fishery allowed in the region.
- March 12-21, 2012 The Cold Response so far was held in the Arctic. This was the biggest one of the series of four Norwegian exercises with invited Partnership for Peace countries; over 16 000 troops participated.

## 7. More sources to study

- The full text of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea:  
[http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf).
- The official list of submissions to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, among others there are claims of Arctic states:  
[http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs\\_new/commission\\_submissions.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/commission_submissions.htm).
- Oil and Gas Resource Potential North of the Arctic Circle:  
[http://www.iosc.org/papers\\_posters/IOSC-2011-203-file001.pdf](http://www.iosc.org/papers_posters/IOSC-2011-203-file001.pdf) .
- The Seminar on Security Prospects in the High North in Reykjavik, Iceland:  
[http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news\\_49745.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_49745.htm?selectedLocale=en).
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# Top partneři

Generální partner  
Modelu OSN



Hlavní partner  
Modelu OSN



Hlavní partner Modelu NATO



Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí  
České republiky

Model NATO is co-sponsored by  
the North Atlantic Treaty Organization



Hlavní partner Modelu EU



Partner konference



Univerzitní  
partner



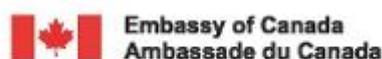
Partner zahájení



Partner jednání



# Partneři Modelů



# Mediální partneři

Hlavní mediální partner



Hlavní mediální partner



Partner Chronicle



Za podpory





**Asociace  
pro mezinárodní  
otázky**  
Association  
for International  
Affairs

Pražský studentský summit  
projekt Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky