

Global Challenges in the Arctic Region: Sovereignty, environment and geopolitical balance. By Elena Conde & Sara Iglesias (eds.) (London and New York, Routledge, 2017), 464 pp.

Some years ago, I devoured Fergus Fleming's *Ninety Degrees North: The Quest for the North Pole*, published in 2001 and translated into Spanish in 2007 by Jordi Beltrán Ferrer as *La conquista del Polo Norte*. Obviously, the work reviewed here has nothing to do with that story. I mention it only to underscore the fascinating history of a challenging space for humans, replete with expeditions, failure, disappearances, mutiny, improbable events, deceit, heroics, and even the occasional episode of anthropophagy.

Over time, the explorers naturally gave way to scientists from a variety of disciplines, natural and social. Today, the Arctic region is well known, and both technological developments and natural phenomena caused by humans, especially climate change, have aroused sovereign ambitions with the ensuing problems. These problems range from the delimitation of spaces between countries with Arctic coasts to the opening of new navigation routes through the Northwest and Northeast Passages amidst Canadian and Russian claims of sovereignty. They include projects to exploit natural resources at sea and on the continental shelf, even beyond the 200 nautical miles from any coast and at the expense of a seabed defined as the common heritage of mankind. Indeed, they encompass threats to the natural environment so far-reaching that, from a human perspective, the growing need to resettle the Inuit or Eskimos in areas less threatened by the melting ice is echoed thousands of kilometres away where, due to the rising sea levels, the people of Vanuatu, in the Pacific, or the Maldives, in the Indian Ocean, are being forced to abandon islands as poor as they are paradisiacal simply to survive.

The complex problems of the Arctic region have become a sort of “trending topic” of our days. The book reviewed here takes a multidisciplinary, if fundamentally legal and political, approach to some of them. Consisting of 22 chapters, it begins with two introductory contributions. The remainder are organised into five parts devoted to: issues of sovereignty (Part I); Arctic governance, with special emphasis on the Arctic Council and the progressive involvement of civil society (Part II); the dilemma of the displacement of the Inuit, their rights, the protection of Arctic species and the regulation of the trade in wildlife (Part III); the environment and the exploitation of fisheries and mineral resources, renewable energies, and emissions reduction (Part IV); and geopolitical and security challenges (Part V). The chapters follow an open structure that, according to the editors, reflects the “centre of gravity” of each contribution. The challenges of climate change, the conservation and protection of the environment, sustainable development, cooperation amongst Arctic States and between them and non-Arctic States, and the role to be played by the European Union lie at the core of the book and permeate its pages. However, in yet another smart decision by the editors, the last two chapters merit special attention. They are devoted to China and its aspirations —today achievable and, indeed, already partly achieved— of becoming a great power. Perhaps that is why it has already learnt to act with a certain disregard for international standards. But that is in the South China Sea, not the Arctic, where it is trying to carve out a niche for itself, as a global player, using scientific cooperation as a peaceful diplomatic weapon to penetrate and entrench its interests.

This book grew out of the R+D project “The Race for the Arctic: Issues of International Law Arising in the Light of Climate Change”, proposed and led by one of the editors —Professor Elena Conde— and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness. Conde

successfully recruited 11 (mostly young) researchers to a team that, when the book was conceived, swelled to 25 (some no longer so young), who authored and co-authored the various chapters. One third of the contributors are affiliated with Spanish universities; the rest are from European, Asian and Canadian institutions, academic and otherwise.

With this book Conde and her co-editor Sara Iglesias have managed to put the Arctic question on the research agendas of jurists and political scientists at Spanish universities, as well as forge links with institutions in other countries, especially those European countries with the greatest interests in the Arctic (due to their proximity or advanced knowledge of it) and Canada. Published with care in English by Routledge, its dissemination is guaranteed. It is highly recommended.

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