Academic Symposium on Arctic Shipping

HAMBURG, GERMANY
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Hapag-Lloyd Center for Shipping and Global Logistics (CSGL)
at Kühne Logistics University (KLU)

-Afterthoughts-

Prof. Dr. Uwe Nixdorf from Alfred Wegener Institut, Helmholtz-Zentum für Polar- und Meeresforschung (AWI) opened the Academic Symposium on Arctic Shipping with his insights on the development of the arctic from a geophysical perspective. As he has contributed to the study of mass balance of polar ice sheets using different methods ranging from reflection seismic, ground based and airborne radar systems to radar altimetry, his speech established a great starting point for the conference audience to emerge in the topic of Arctic Shipping throughout the day.

For the first session, Mr. Marten van den Bossche from Ecoris and Runa Skarbø from DVN GL followed these opening words with their insights to prospects and impacts of commercial navigation along the Northern Sea Route and with aspects of the complexity of shipping in the arctic. Captain Richard von Berlepsch from Hapag-Lloyd joined these two after their presentations for a lively Q&A round, to represent the current challenges of the industry from the ship-side. In the discussions, it became clear that Arctic Shipping causes significant risks because of the inhospitable environment. The ice is unpredictable and the ecosystem in the arctic is particularly delicate.

In the second session after a short break, Prof. Dr. Adolf Ng explained arctic ports and infrastructures on the experiences gained in Canada. He pointed out that much of the available infrastructure, namely ports, are more politically driven than economically viable. Thus, currently, the development of any arctic route presents itself as challenging. Dr. Andreas Raspotnik followed up with insights to the European Union Arctic policies. Clear is, that under current conditions, the EU is not creating active participation towards the policies created around the arctic, which may be a missed opportunity when Arctic Shipping becomes more feasible and more widespread. As a nice counterpart, Mr. Uwe Will from bremenports demonstrated the vision of bremenports for the Arctic. They are currently already co-developing a port in Iceland to make specific use of the blue economy and of the chances arising. Prof. Mikaa Mered concluded the presentations with his knowledge on Arctic and Antarctic geopolitics. The most interesting point for the participants in the audience was that Arctic Shipping would very likely happen in our lifetime. With LNG and oil exports and imports growing, the Arctic becomes not only the route of transport but also the region of wells. Many ships have already crossed the Arctic, we just do not necessarily have noticed.

Conclusively, the natural challenges and the risks the environment is causing to creating and frequently using the Arctic Shipping routes are currently a drawback. However, with the changes to the climate and thus to the ice in the Arctic, it seems reasonable to consider Arctic Shipping a technical possibility for the future to cut transit times and thus expenses. A set of adequate requirements, laws and regulations as standards are needed until then, to organize this new and growing traffic to limit impact on the fragile environment that was mostly untouched by the human race for a long time.