

Chapter 8

Collaboration Between Russia and the Countries of Northeast Asia in the Arctic

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the Arctic region has become an object of high attention and extensive studies from the side of the international community. The countries of Northeast Asia, particularly China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, demonstrate their interest in the Arctic issue. Among the opportunities to get involved in the development of the Arctic is the collaboration with Russia. The countries have common interests in the region and complementary opportunities. Moreover, Russia and the countries of Northeast Asia do not have critical disagreements between themselves. The authors argue that the collaboration between Russia and the countries of Northeast Asia can potentially establish a new economic paradigm in the High North. One of the key elements of such collaboration is the Russian region of the Far East, a territory that Russia attempts to develop and integrate into the economy of Northeast Asia. Among other issues, this chapter discusses the capacity of the Far East as a gate through which the countries of Northeast Asia may approach the Arctic.

INTRODUCTION

In 21st century, Arctic region becomes an object of increasing attention and study for the international community. According to different estimations, the Arctic holds significant reserves of world's natural resources which can become a resource base for the global economy – over 25% of world's crude oil and gas, diamonds, gold, copper-nickel ore, tin, platinum group elements, rare-earth metals (Gautier, Bird, &

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Charpentier, 2009). Particularly, the Arctic accumulates nearly 90 billion barrels of crude oil, 47 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, and 44 billion barrels of gas condensate (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2011a).

Along with its resources, the Arctic attracts international attention with its transport and logistics potential. Arctic marine transport lanes allow reducing distance, time, and cost of shipping between Asia, Europe, and North America compared to traditional routes through Suez and Panama canals. For example, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is 2,440 nautical miles shorter than Suez Canal and reduces shipment time by ten days and saves approximately 800 tons of fuel per an average vessel (Gao & Erokhin, 2017). So far, the interest of international transport companies to transit transportation via the Arctic Ocean has not been high, but the advantages of the Arctic routes over the traditional southern ones will increase the attractiveness of shipping in the High North, particularly, with the emergence of new technological and organizational solutions.

Despite the growing economic attractiveness, the Arctic is still weakly integrated into the international economic activities. This fact creates good opportunities for all countries, not only circumpolar ones, to participate in the exploration of the Arctic and development of the Arctic economic system. Today, Nordic countries are no longer the only ones who have exclusive interests in the Arctic. Over 25 countries of the world have already elaborated their Arctic strategies or similar documents explaining their policies in relation to the Arctic. Countries of Northeast Asia have always stood apart in the Arctic-related matters. In recent years, China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea have demonstrated the major concern and commitment to the Arctic. All three states obtained observer status in the Arctic Council and released their Arctic policies (the Republic of Korea in 2013, Japan in 2013, and China in 2018).

Countries of Northeast Asia have related interests and challenges in the context of the development of the Arctic region. Such similarity of attitudes is one of the major reasons why China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea have tried to coordinate their Arctic policies since 2015. The three states have established a regular mechanism of high-level discussions of the Arctic issues. The meetings are conducted on an annual basis, the first being held in 2016 in Seoul and the second in 2017 in Tokyo.

Primarily, the interests of the three countries of Northeast Asia center around the utilization of the economic potential of the Arctic. Deposits of mineral resources, especially, hydrocarbons, and transportation lanes are extremely important for energy-intensive and export-oriented economies of Northeast Asia. Russia, in its turn, has a jurisdiction over the NSR and can ensure the navigation in the polar waters with due support provided by the icebreakers fleet and established (though outdated) meteorological, communication (satellite and global positioning system (GPS)), and transport infrastructure in the region. Among the Nordic states, Russia also holds the biggest reserves of natural resources concentrated in the Arctic zone of the country. The estimated value of mineral resources in the Russian Arctic exceeds \$30 trillion (Filippov & Zhukov, 2006).

The above-said emphasizes a substantial ground for the essential and even inevitable collaboration between Russia and the countries of Northeast Asia in the Arctic. However, the Arctic policies of Russia and Northeast Asian states should not be promoted by economic interests only. Such issues as environmental protection, studying of processes ongoing in the Arctic, and implementation of eco-friendly and north-adopted technologies in the region are also important. Cooperation with Russia will not only contribute to the study and development of new ways and methods of utilization of the Arctic resource and economic potential but also provide a basis for an effective work in this field.

Considering this, it can be stated that the cooperation between Russia and the countries of Northeast Asia is important to ensure the sustainable development of the Arctic region. Such multilateral cooperation is a logical continuation of China-Russia cooperation in the Arctic and the first step in the establish-

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