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PLACE AND ROLE OF THE ARCTIC REGION IN THE 2023 FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена изучению Арктического региона во внешней политике России. Целью исследования является анализ места Арктики в Концепции внешней политики России 2023 года. Использование анализа официальных документов, посвященных Арктике, и сравнительного анализа, применяемого для оценки позиций России по вопросам её присутствия в регионе, помогают раскрыть важность Арктики для внешней политики РФ, в том числе с точки зрения экономики и экологии. Результаты исследования демонстрируют как негативные, так и позитивные факторы, с которыми может столкнуться Россия в регионе.

Ключевые слова: Арктика, Концепция внешней политики, Российские интересы, Северный морской путь, арктические ресурсы

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The development of international relations after the beginning of the Special Military Operation orchestrated by Russia has raised critical questions regarding the relevance and necessity of foreign policy adjustments. On the 31st of March, Russian President Vladimir Putin approved a new version of the document, reflecting the core principles, norms, and directions of Russian foreign policy. Currently, Moscow stands as a driving force in the establishment of a global order based on the supremacy of international law, the sovereign equality of states, the diversity of cultures, civilisations, and the rejection of hegemony in international affairs. These fundamental tenets underpin the Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Russian Federation, published on the 31st of March 2023. This latest edition of the document not only reflects the emergence of new world development tendencies but also serves as a direct response to the confrontation with a large coalition of Western states striving to preserve their hegemony. As tension escalates, the clash between rivals takes on new dimensions, expanding the conflict into new regions, most notably the Arctic, which is potentially a cornerstone for future disputes and confrontations.

Before a new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation was enacted, Moscow had been following documents that reflected long-term goals in the Arctic region and defined the main directions of Russian presence in the region, for instance, “Basics of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic up to 2035” and “About the Strategy of Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security until 2035”. Russia bears in mind the strategic significance of this region in terms of military and economic aspects. Particular attention

is paid to the development of the Northern Sea Route infrastructure that paves the way for the extraction and transportation of hydrocarbon resources, contributing to Russia and its trade partners economically. The Arctic region holds a pivotal position in geopolitics, particularly in light of the evolving foreign policy doctrines of nations with interests in the region. Why is the Arctic on the forefront of the new Foreign Policy Concept 2023.

The goal of the research is an assessment of the nuanced role of the Arctic within the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2023 in this critical milestone of international relations. **The article pursues the following objectives:** to study the Arctic's significance for the Russian Federation, to inquire about the extracts from the Foreign Policy Concept 2023 in regard to the Arctic and finally consider possible challenges for development of this region in the future. Such methods as comparison, analysis of documents and policies are employed. They will help to understand existing factors on the Arctic and its significance for Russia.

This research is timely and crucial for several reasons. As tension escalates on the global stage, the Arctic has emerged as a forefront of strategic interest, with potential consequences for the balance of power, since Russia has the largest territory in the Arctic, which makes it a pretender for a sufficient part of natural resources that may boost the economy, along with the developing North Sea Route. Additionally, understanding Russia's stance on Arctic affairs is vital for pondering about dynamics of international relations. By delving into the Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Russian Federation, we seek to illuminate the arduous interaction between geopolitical circumstances and national interests as the current balance of powers experiences changes not only in world politics but also in the economy. It is worth mentioning that since 2022 the presidency of Russia in the Arctic Council was paralysed due to unwillingness of western countries to cooperate. Unfortunately, confrontational policy of Western states obstructed the exchange of information between member-states on climate change, environmental change in the Arctic region. Such an impasse hinders the integrity of the organisation and its work, whilst it is impossible to exclude the Russian Federation from the Arctic framework. Alas, the dialogue within the Barents/Euro-arctic Council is frozen as well. Considering the inability of working under the Arctic Council and Barents/Euro-arctic Council, current goals and objectives outlined in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2023 pave the way for sustainable development of the Arctic on its own with the help of non-governmental scientific organisations where Russia is still presented.

The review of sources in the document comprises an analysis of current strategic documents that sheds the light on Russia's policy in the Arctic, namely the Foreign Policy Concept of 2023, including an examination of this doctrine. Such a document outlines long-term goals for the region and defines the main directions for Russia's presence in the Arctic, emphasising its strategic and economic importance. Moreover, works of prominent researchers are used, such as the joint book of Sergey Zhiltsov and Igor Zonn, who assess the importance of the Polar region in terms of political and economic spheres. In addition, the scientific research of Sergey Chernov contributes to the revealing of the Arctic as a region that plays a pivotal role regarding hydrocarbon resources and international cooperation.

Since March 2021 Russia has been working on the expansion of the shelf in the Arctic Ocean as Moscow pursues to establish the outer limit of the continental shelf, because it is a long-standing objective for Russia leading to the enforcement of its stances in the World Ocean, especially in the context of confrontation with the Western powers. **Today, such a view is reflected in the Foreign Policy Concept, according to it, revitalisation of the lawful establishment of Russian borders and sea ones with a view of its sovereignty and jurisdiction is vital.** Furthermore, the document emphasises the the historical status of the international legal regime of the inland seas of the Russian Federation. It is worth noting that Western states dispute this issue. The continental shelf provides a particular interest for arctic countries since it comprises

many deposits of mineral resources [Shepelev, Shustov : 3]. Therefore, Russia presenting the Foreign Policy Concept reminds once again that it will defend national interests in the region and will continue pursuing the continental shelf expansion.

Russian diplomacy adheres to a peaceful resolution of contradictions, especially in the Arctic region. This principle is emphasised multiple times in various documents, including a new Foreign Policy Concept of 2023. According to the doctrine, the Russian Federation stands on the settling disputes in the Arctic by using peaceful means since arctic states are responsible for sustainable development of the region and following international law, namely United Nations Conventions on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 which regulates relations in the Arctic Sea¹, it is a constitution of sea as some international lawyers name it [Chernov : 8]. That stance is defining for Russia, as it meets the state's interests. For instance, in the programme presented by Russia before presiding over the Arctic Council, there was a principle aimed at sustainable development and responsible governance in the region. Thus, engagement in multilateral cooperation and comprehensive amelioration of northern territories are guidelines of Russian policy. Along with it, the Foreign Policy Concept of 2023 includes an evaluation of arctic countries' actions that now reveal the course of militarisation of this region. Recently, the Russian Foreign Office has declared that expanding NATO influence at the expense of Finland and Sweden menaces Russia's interests in northern latitudes². Moscow will react to this by opposing the course of the unfriendly states towards militarisation of the region and limitation of the capabilities of Russia for the realisation of its sovereign rights in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation³.

Considering the inability to break the deadlock in relations with Western countries, Russia has begun **enhancing cooperation with other countries interested in the Arctic**, for instance, China which is ready to cooperate on a wide range of issues, encompassing the development of the Northern Sea Route's infrastructure and the construction of ports with the direct involvement of Chinese enterprises [Zhiltsov, Zonn : 131]. Russia seeks to work mutually beneficially with non-arctic states, pursuing a positive policy regarding Russia. Moreover, it is interested in interacting with states which are willing to contribute to the infrastructural development of the Northern Sea Route⁴. China plays an essential role in this project, such a position is seen as deepening relations, since it corresponds to both Moscow's and Beijing's interests. In particular, in light of Chinese trade relations with the EU, the North Sea Route will provide all sides with lots of golden opportunities in terms of goods shipments on the European market. It is worth mentioning that for 2022, the trade turnover between the PRC and the EU is 856 billion euros⁵. Recently, in March 2023, during the visit of Xi Jinping to Moscow, Vladimir Putin and his counterpart agreed to establish a body working on a project of elaboration of the North Sea Route [Zhiltsov : 11] . It is evident that the participation of China in the expansion of the trade route will reshape the global economy, amid it the Northern Sea Route is becoming particularly important.

One of the priorities in the Arctic region of Russia is **to take care of the vulnerable ecological system of the Arctic**. Moscow is interested in the maintenance of natural equilibrium, which was noted in speeches of Russian officials as well as in official documents. The ongoing climate change disrupts the Arctic's outdated infrastructure. Maxim Evdokimov, a representative of the Federal Agency for Strategic Initiatives, says as the temperature climbs, it leads to crises in the economy. Energy plants and pipelines are under risk due to the increasing speed of the wind⁶. **The Foreign Policy Concept of 2023 pays attention to the necessity of combating climate change.** The document emphasises that so as to preserve a favourable natural environment and improve it, Russia will rationally adapt to climate change for the sake of the modern, future generations and the traditional way of life of the humans living in the Arctic. Indigenous peoples, and the scientific community—are responsible for mitigating climate change and reducing related uncertainties at a

time when some are stressing economic growth and others are highlighting the environmental risks of exploitation [Spohr, Hamilton: 320].

In this light, the Russian Federation strives to support international efforts to restrict the impact on the environment by decreasing greenhouse emissions. Along with other states, Russia is aimed at establishing global norms of nature saving and climate regulations. Moreover, Moscow stands against the politicisation of efforts against climate change, every state has its own right to choose ways of coping with it. Additionally, Russia promotes effective cooperation in terms of inventing and using technologies contributing to keeping a safe environment and preventing cross-border damage to the environment of the Russian Federation⁷. All these steps once again demonstrate that Russia is faithful to its commitment to struggle against climate change. The country will continue playing a pivotal role in the normalisation of the climate situation not only in its polar territories but also around the world since inaction might pose an existential threat to the state, society and ordinary people.

To draw the conclusion, it should be observed that the Arctic remains a sufficient region for implementing Russian foreign policy. It is the Arctic that is placed in the 2nd place in the section with regional priorities, conceding CIS in the Foreign Policy Concept 2023. The assessment of the document demonstrates the strategic importance of the Arctic for Russia, which is emphasised by its high position in the Foreign Policy Concept, in the light of growing tension in the region due to NATO's expansion. The course on the presence in the region signifies that it is the economic incentive which is crucial for Russia in the Arctic. There is no doubt that the stance in the polar region becomes more and more relevant as even non-arctic states seek to participate in affairs related to it. The arctic is plentiful of natural resources, this is particularly true due to hydrocarbons, which are estimated to account for a quarter of the world's reserves [Zhiltsov, Zonn : 12]. The region stretches from Europe, Asia to North America that makes it possible to develop the Northern Sea Route, the shortest path for goods making their way from Europe to Asia. The region may become a common ground for political and economic cooperation that might split over on other spheres.

However, there are several risks that put peaceful interaction under threat. The Arctic policy of Russia is implemented amid pressure from Western states, the US and its allies strive to weaken economic potential in this region by engaging in the development of the Arctic militarily. For instance, In May 2023, US Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks visited Alaska, where she paid great attention to the climate impact on the Arctic infrastructure of military objects and security issues in the region⁸. Such events fuel new rounds of regional militarisation. For this reason, the geopolitical positions of Russia in the region update on the issue of its security due to the largest coastline with coastal and port infrastructure in the Arctic Ocean. This is vulnerable to interference from outside, as logistics from the interior of the continent are difficult to maintain. Unfortunately, the ongoing climate change poses challenges not only to the environment, and indigenous people but also to economic industries and infrastructural facilities that may hinder the execution of strategies aimed at sustainable development of the Arctic and the lives of ordinary people who reside there.

In the future, the Arctic will remain a fault line with the Western countries, if the confrontation continues. Considering this fact, the balancing of threats militarily, using raw materials and expanding trade routes can be seen as objectives of Russian foreign policy in this region, taking care of which will impact significantly on Russia's stances in the region. A comprehensive arctic policy may offer golden opportunities in terms of improving living standards for indigenous people, amelioration of sea infrastructure resulting in economic benefits.

Примечания

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³ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации.

⁴ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации.

⁵ China-EU — international trade in goods statistics // Eurostat. 2023. Available at : https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=China-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics#China_largest_partner_for_EU_imports_of_goods_in_2022 (accessed: 29.10.2023).

⁶ Сухановская Т. Как в Арктике адаптируются к изменениям климата // Российская газета [интернет-портал]. 2023. 24 октября. URL: <https://rg.ru/2023/10/24/reg-szfo/kak-v-arktike-adaptiruiutsia-k-izmeneniam-klimata.html?ysclid=lobkx06cmf575865962> (дата обращения: 29.10.2023).

⁷ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации.

⁸ Cusick D. U.S. Military Sees Growing Threat in Thawing Permafrost // Scientific American. October 29. Available at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/u-s-military-sees-growing-threat-in-thawing-permafrost/#:~:> (accessed: 29.10.2023).

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Abstract. The article examines the role of the Arctic region in Russia's foreign policy. The study aims to analyze the role of the Arctic region in Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept. Various methods, including analyzing official documents and making comparisons, are used. These approaches help reassess Russia's foreign policy in terms of both economy and ecology, while also evaluating Moscow's stance on its presence in the region. The findings of the study reveal a range of both detrimental and beneficial factors that Russia may encounter in the Arctic area.

Keywords: Arctic, Foreign Policy Concept, Russian interests, Northern Sea Route, Arctic resources

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