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Russian Arctic: The Logic and Paradoxes of Changes

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ABSTRACT. *The paper contemplates massive transformation processes in the Russian Arctic zone, identified by the authors as the “re-development” of the Arctic, which integrate resource-intensive but necessary exploitation of the huge “Soviet legacy” and construction of the novel industrial and social facilities and infrastructure. The key role of Russian Arctic “re-development” as the most appropriate model at the country and regional lev-*

els is substantiated. The success of the Arctic development will depend to a decisive extent on the advanced revision of the basic provisions of the current state of industrial, energy, transport, demographic, etc policies. The paradoxes of the demographic situation in the Russian Arctic are considered and the directions of the organization of health care system in this macro-region are introduced taking into account: (a) specificity of the urbanized and rural

areas in the Western and Eastern (beyond the Urals) parts of the Russian Arctic; (b) specific needs for medical service provided to miners and metalworkers, servicemen, sailors and shift workers as well as communities of the indigenous peoples of the Russian North. Peculiarities of interaction between the state policy and that of the big corporations in the Arctic are disclosed including those concerning climatic risks mitigation. Given this perspective the public policy measures to regulate greenhouse gas emissions proposed by the Ministry of economic development of the Russian Federation are critically assessed. In conclusion, the consistency of recent changes in the development policy in the Russian Arctic that should result in organization of a special Federal ministry for the Arctic is substantiated.

KEY WORDS: *Arctic, re-development, population, indigenous minority peoples of the North, state, large corporations, demographic paradoxes, health, climate change, public administration*

Statement of the problem

The Russian Arctic is a macroregion of our country most riddled with paradox, combining both unique and typical features, traditions and innovations. The Russian Arctic zone is undergoing a rapid and distinctly different kind of transformation processes, which require a tailored scientific approach to determining their genesis and essence in order to define and subsequently implement a government policy in the Arctic. The authors believe that the first requirement for that is to form scientifically sound notions about the subject of such a policy, which is now fundamentally different not only from the way it was at the end of the Soviet era and in the early 1990s, but also from

the Russian Arctic of the 2000s. These notions are to be based on extensive data about the developments in the Russian Arctic and a unique methodology for its analysis proposed by the authors, as well as new approaches to understanding sustainability of the Arctic territorial system and assessing the possibilities of combining the goals of state governance and corporate interests in the context of the controversial effects produced by new external and internal factors.

In the light of this, there is a special cognitive and practical interest for the following issues that experts see as the most controversial:

- the very feasibility of objectively assessing the social, economic and political situation in the Russian Arctic considering the widespread opinion that the input data is of low quality (incomplete or inaccurate);
- the paradigm of the current transformation processes in the Russian Arctic and their interconnection with the developments across Russia, primarily nationwide reforms;
- the actual role big Russian corporations play in the “re-development” of the Russian Arctic;
- the role and form of state governance in the transformation processes in the Russian Arctic;
- the possibilities of solving the long-standing issue of creating the national “Arctic law” as a key factor in securing the interests of the state, the business community and the people in the transformation processes in the Russian Arctic.

Any of the aforementioned issues can serve as a focus for separate articles, while the format of this article allows us only to outline the essence of them and the interconnection, which we believe is of the utmost importance at this point.

Informational and methodological options for systemic analysis of the current situation in the Arctic

The existing database on the current situation in the Russian Arctic and prospects for its development is huge and constantly growing, thanks to the international network of universities, colleges, research institutes and other organizations involved in education and research in the Circumpolar North [Moskaleva, Osipov, Eremenko, Hirshberg, Kullerud, Radford, Herzog 2016]. Fundamental and practical issues related to the Russian Arctic have been thoroughly analyzed in articles by Russian researchers and academicians. In 2018, the authors proposed and along with researchers from a number of aforementioned institutions participated in creating a research and analysis publication about all research studies conducted in 2000-2017 and promising studies of the social and economic issues in the Russian Arctic to be completed in 2018-2021. The publication also contained short descriptions of key personalities and an annotated list of publications (over 4,000 items) and thesis papers.

The abundance of input data on various aspects of Arctic-related issues creates both hypothetical opportunities and significant obstacles for its systemic analysis. In our experience, even statistical data from Rosstat requires correcting.

Unfortunately, many research studies of the Arctic are limited by their scope and allocated resources, and thus remain within the boundaries of traditional scientific specialization, which sharply decreases their effectiveness. This is evident from the fact that research studies on the current transformation processes in the Russian Arctic frequently fail to

take into consideration the tremendous (and often decisive) impact made by the realities of Russian regulatory environment, i.e. the combination of procedures and restrictions on the authorities, individuals and legal entities and, no less importantly, the way they are implemented and perceived by society and individuals. The insufficient attention our Arctic experts pay to this issue becomes particularly apparent in juxtaposition to an array of studies on federal, regional and municipal law (including those that are especially significant in terms of analyzing the spatial characteristics of the Russian Arctic, constitutional and legal foundations of the territorial structure of Russia and about territories in public law [Leksin 2014; Narutto, Shugrina, Isaev, Alebastrova 2013]), with its recent addition in the form of thorough legal analytics methodology [Isakov 2016].

The heterogeneous and diverse issues in the Arctic, as will be explained below, all have the same roots and consequences, which prompted the authors to develop and use a methodology for studying the socio-economic and legal nature of the Arctic realities that would reflect their systemic nature to the fullest possible extent. Such is the methodology for systemic diagnostic assessment of socio-economic and other processes, situations and problems based on the principles of applied system analysis, which involves, first of all, insight into the systemic nature of these issues.

The authors also used a methodological approach to processing and analyzing input data through econometric operations, including correlation matrices and clustering indicators by correlation coefficients, thus forming the informational and methodological basis for the concepts introduced in the next sections of the article.

Genesis of existing problems in the Arctic

The current state of affairs in the Russian Arctic is in equal parts determined by the unique consequences of its post-Soviet transition and its close connection to the general situation in Russia. In our analysis we would like to draw attention to the fact that researchers barely delve into how the “Soviet legacy” functions and is utilized. While this legacy played an important role for the country as a whole (and served as a major reason for its stability in the 1990s), we have to take into consideration the problems arising from integrating the facilities created within the largely isolated and noncompetitive command economy into the new market economy. The prime example of this is the situation in the Russian Arctic.

Soviet and Russian researchers [Aganbegyan 1984; Timoshenko 2011; Timoshenko 2012] have conducted thorough studies on the development of the Arctic in the Soviet era, when over 90% (according to our assessment) of the economic and infrastructural potential capabilities that the Russian Arctic is to a certain extent utilizing even now were created. However, everything – from economic ties to social policies – has changed, and since the early 1990s the transformation of the “Soviet legacy” in the Russian Arctic has been proceeding in the form of “re-development”, i.e. maintaining, modernizing or eliminating the non-competitive parts of the legacy, while altering motivations and paternalistic notions of the generation that grew up at the same time as they were set up.

In post-Soviet Russia, the Arctic turned into one of the most rapidly developing macroregions in a fundamentally different context of competitive market and social responsibility. We’re seeing a more active use of the Northern Sea Route with new ice-class ships, upgraded or new ports and innovative logistics. The defense

infrastructure network has basically been rebuilt from scratch. Largest and widely known hydrocarbon fields have been discovered and mined. In Murmansk Oblast, the production of non-ferrous metals and apatites is being expanded and modernized. In the northern parts of Krasnoyarsk Krai, the Norilsk mining and metallurgical combine facilities have been upgraded and relocated. In Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, large gold ore fields are being mined, with new ones readied for mining.

Admittedly, most new projects have been successful, but we cannot disregard the costs of bringing any “Soviet legacy” facility (industrial facilities, ports, housing, social infrastructure) up to date with new requirements. In some cases, it means cutting off the funding. It is clear that the towns and settlements that were established solely to ensure the operation of factories and facilities working with nonrenewable natural resources would eventually cease to exist. These Arctic towns, unlike monotowns which could no longer survive on noncompetitive economic basis, can’t use the same approach of changing their specialization or utilizing commuting mechanisms. The related problems, as well as the combination of advantages and disadvantages that come with the “Soviet legacy” are an inherent part of the new “re-development” transformation processes in Russian Arctic. This should be properly reflected in the federal and regional budgets and funds allocated for the Russian Arctic, social and economic development priorities and all strategic development documents.

A key aspect of the suggested approach to studying the issues of the Russian Arctic is acknowledging that their essence and solutions are the direct result of the foreign, economic, social, financial and regional policies implemented over the last several decades. Without taking that into account, any attempts to resolve these issues and even create strategic documents out-

lining solutions will be doomed to remain limited by the Arctic geography, artificially separated from the developments across the rest of the country, and outside it.

Here are two specific examples concerning the “negative population growth and outflow of labor resources” in the Arctic, which the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security up to 2020 (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy) recognizes as an Arctic-only issue. The out-migration of residents of the Soviet Arctic “capital” (as the town of Dikson was often referred to in the 1960s and 1970s), established in the Soviet times to perform tasks of crucial national importance, saw a ten-time spike, which was triggered solely by the fact that until recently they have been excluded from post-Soviet Russia’s national policy. One of the reasons Chukotka Autonomous Region saw a three-time increase in “negative population growth and out-migration” was its swift and unjustified demilitarization – a reflection of the foreign policy adopted by the Russian federal government in the early 1990s based on the conviction that “Russia no longer has any enemies.”

All the developments in the Russian Arctic are a direct consequence of the nationwide “transition process”, with its paradoxical and uniquely shaped continuous reforms, all-encompassing and fast privatization, “budget federalism” and center-region relationships, unprofitable domestic investment, scaling down or closing down machine building, defense, technical and other facilities, social gap and so on, exacerbated by extreme external pressure (including in the form of sanctions) experienced by the entire country.

There is also new proof of a strong correlation between nationwide policies and the situation in the Russian Arctic. Only the successful implementation of the “digitalization” aspect of the national policy ensured the expansion and quality increase

in digital communication between all Arctic towns. Russia’s new military policy was the reason for the polar defense shield revival, which involved establishing a fully functioning network of nicely equipped polar towns. Modernizing and expanding ship and machine building, as well as other Russian industries helped to start providing the Northern Sea Route projects with state-of-the-art icebreakers and so on. As the country develops, so does the Arctic, and with it comes prosperity for Russia as a whole. This was the main message in the address delivered by the Russian President in April 2019 at the “Arctic: Territory of Dialogue” 5th International Arctic Forum. We are convinced that in many cases solving the issues plaguing the Arctic is an extraterritorial task and can be accomplished only through combining all the aspects of the Arctic “re-development” with the recently launched re-evaluation of all the aspects of Russia’s domestic policy.

Big corporations and national interests

Achieving the development goals for the Russian Arctic requires tremendous resources in the form of investment, technology and administration. With the current socio-economic and foreign policy factors, the state and big corporations have become the main actors. While not disputing the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises for the development of the Russian Arctic, the state focuses primarily on big businesses, possibly because at this time they are the ones who manage to successfully implement corporate social responsibility policies.

The state is interested in the efficiency of such companies. In Norilsk, for example, the company managed to save 11 billion rubles thanks to the Russian government’s decision to clear all tariffs on non-alloyed nickel and copper cathodes

in advance. Only one fifth of 2,500 Nor-nickel employees chose to quit, while retirees received funds to move “to the mainland” (10-12 fixed salaries in addition to a relocation allowance); over 4 billion rubles was spent on social concerns alone. A key government support measure for big businesses operating in the Russian Arctic is preferential treatment envisaged by the decision to create “core development zones in the Russian Arctic.” The Russian President spoke about the need for new preferential regimes at the “Arctic: Territory of Dialogue” 5th International Arctic Forum in April 2019.

It stands to reason that the policies of the corporations with larger government shares are more closely aligned with government interests. This is the case with PJSC Rosneft, 50% of which in December 2019 was owned by Rosneftegaz (a Russian company which manages state assets in the oil and gas industry)¹. The corporation has been developing the great potential of its the Arctic cluster, which includes the company’s own mining projects in the region, such as Vankor, Suzun, Tagul and Lodochnoe fields, as well as a number of exploration projects in the southern and, in the future, eastern Taymyr. With the resources provided by strategic investors from Western countries and South-East Asia, oil production is expected to reach 100 million tons by 2030, at the same time ensuring conditions for integrated development of related industry sectors. For that, we need an attractive investment climate, including a special tax regime, throughout the life cycle of new projects.

Another aspect of Rosneft’s Arctic cluster connected to the Northern Sea Route has to do with modernizing the Zvezda shipyard, which includes resolving related social issues and, first and foremost, hous-

ing construction. As of spring 2019, Rosneft has placed orders for 25 ships with Zvezda, including four multifunctional reinforced ice class supply vessels and 10 Aframax tankers running on natural gas motor fuel for transporting crude materials via the Northern Sea Route. The construction of ten shuttle tankers of a new design (110,000 DWT) is underway. The total deadweight tonnage of ships ordered by Rosneft and mainly slated for operating in the Arctic exceeds 2 million tons. Apart from Rosneft’s orders, the shipyard has been contracted to build 11 more ships: five for Gazprom and Sovcomflot each, and one for Rosmorport. In addition, Novatek signed a capacity-payment contract with Zvezda to construct LNG carriers. If successful, in the future Zvezda will be able to compete with South Korean shipyards, which are going to take part in the first stages of building these LNG carriers.

Arctic development as part of state policy

One of the most controversial and, unfortunately, politicized issues is related to the reasons for designating the Arctic a special zone and justifiability of its spatial characteristics. In expert and public discussions, the laws and regulations on governing the Russian Arctic are frequently criticized in terms of their purpose, contents and feasibility. Several years ago the authors in collaboration with Russian Academy of Sciences member Viktor Ivanter substantiated the claim that government interests dominate the development and implementation of policies concerning the Russian Arctic. There is no other macroregional entity in the world of that size and diversity, and the sole reason

1 With 19.75% owned by BP Russian Investments Limited and 18.9% by QH Oil Investments LLC. (Share Capital Structure // Rosneft // https://www.rosneft.ru/Investors/structure/share_capital/, accessed 12.12.2019).

it exists has to do with clear-cut national interests.

Russia's *geopolitical and defense interests* in the Arctic have to do with provable need to ensure the entire country (not just the Arctic) is safe from potential foreign aggression involving the navy, air forces, IBMs or spacecraft, especially when it comes to the Northern Sea Route facilities and users. This has always been an extremely challenging task, and it still hasn't been fully tackled. Moreover, continuous adjustment is needed due to the increasingly complicated situation in the international arena and military buildup in other countries.

Our country's *economic interests* are perfectly obvious, as the Arctic provides the bulk of extracted hydrocarbons, non-ferrous, rare and precious metals, apatites, as well as fishery resources, ship construction and repair and so on.

Russia's *social interests* largely concern the 2.4 million people² living in the Arctic, which is more than in all Arctic-bordering countries, and twice as much in terms of percentage of each respective country's total population. The state is compelled to maintain a working social infrastructure and provide social benefits to the people living in the Arctic, a small but important part of whom is the indigenous peoples of the North.

The national importance of the Arctic zone is exceptionally high in the context of *huge opportunities for scientific research*, as it's an absolutely unique place in terms of size, diversity and potential for studying important natural phenomena (e.g. climate change anomalies). Ensuring our Arctic-related research moves with the times is only possible through having and implementing state interests, which have recently become evident.

The aforementioned national interests, but, more importantly, the fact that they are all systemically interconnected and can be effectively pursued only through comprehensive government action, is the rationale for making the Arctic a separately regulated entity within Russia. Nevertheless, for a number of years the way the Arctic was governed has failed to meet the basic effectiveness requirements and to rationally use the program and target technology and project-based approach. This was a reflection of the enduring nominal approach to matters of state importance (e.g. how the Russian government and federal ministries treated the Russian President's instructions) and a conviction that adopting a strategic document (concept, strategy or program) is more important than implementing it. Ironically, the centralized government control that dominates across Russia was conspicuously absent in the Arctic. However, it's possible that one of the reasons for incompetent state management of the Arctic development was the fact that the goals set in the official documents were disproportionally ambitious in the context of no longer available Soviet-era management tools and capacities (including staff- and administration-related) for designing and implementing spatial megaprojects.

The Russian Arctic was transformed into a separately governed entity in several stages. First, Government Resolution no 228 of March 14, 2015, and Government Directive no 431-R of March 14, 2015, established the State Commission for Arctic Development. The step that furthered the government responsibility for the Arctic development in addition to the established collegiate commission was outlined in Government Resolution no 1064 "On Amending Government Resolution

2 Not counting rotational employees who permanently reside in other parts of the country.

no 366 of April 21, 2014 ‘On Adopting the Socioeconomic Development of the Russian Arctic Zone up to 2020 State Program’ of August 31, 2017. One of the appendices contained amendments to Government Resolution no 437 “On the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation” of June 5, 2008, specifying the Ministry’s mandate in the light of its new powers and responsibilities regarding the formation and development of core development zones in the Arctic that are regarded as the key element for developing the region.

A considerable step to creating a federal ministry on developing the Russian Arctic was taken with the adoption of Presidential Decree no 78 “On Improving State Governance in the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation” of February 26, 2019, in accordance to which the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East was transformed into the Ministry for the Development of the Russian Far East and the Arctic and made responsible for developing and enforcing government policy and legal regulation aimed at developing the Arctic. In three months, the Russian government was to clarify the new ministry’s mandate, determine the number of employed officials and present proposals on how to integrate the changes envisioned in the decree into presidential decisions. While the process of unlocking the potential for state management of the Arctic development has admittedly begun, it’s worth noting that so far it doesn’t solve the issue of creating a separate federal body for that. Moreover, it leads to a certain conflict with the Ministry of Economic Development that was, as we

mentioned above, recently put in charge of “creating and developing core development zones in the Arctic.”

On the Russian “Arctic law”

The objective to develop and implement special regulations for economic, social, environmental and other processes in the Russian Arctic was formulated by the President in the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security up to 2020³, and was supposed to have been accomplished by 2015. The fact that it is still not the case, despite our leading legal experts participating in the discussion and conducting relevant research⁴ is surprising. In our opinion, the main reason is that, strange as it may seem, there is no consensus on the subject of this regulation.

Several years ago, when the discussions on the purpose and contents of a federal law aimed at developing the Russian Arctic only just began, the authors of this article voiced their fairly tough stance, and maintain it still. We believe that before drafting a federal law, there has to be an agreement on what specific issues and situations in the Arctic are not covered by existing legal norms, and conclusively require new ones. We stressed the fact that the Arctic is not a “lawless desert” and that (circa late 2018) there were hundreds of presidential decrees, federal laws, government-issued directives and thousands of legal instruments by Russian federal subjects partially or fully applicable to the Arctic zone. They set out regulations for the most important

3 Article 24 of the Strategy envisages “improvements of the legal framework aimed at developing the foundations of governance of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, the legislative recognition of its status as a special subject of state regulation, specifying the list of municipalities whose territories are part of it, as well as the establishment of special regimes for natural resource management and environmental protection, regulation of shipping along the Northern Sea Route.”

4 Namely, a series of “Russian Arctic: Territory of Law” publications by the Institute of Legislation and Comparative Law under the Government of the Russian Federation.

aspects of legal matters and relationships in the Arctic. Over time, the idea to create a kind of “Arctic code” that would contain the entire body of legal norms regulating economic, social, infrastructural, environmental and even international activities in the Russian Arctic was superseded by other proposals, which to a large extent was shaped by a realistic assessment of the so-called international “Arctic law.”

Drafting and adopting a federal law on developing the Russian Arctic, with due consideration for the aforementioned ideas on its subject, seems more than useful. Indeed, there are a number of issues that can be legally resolved only at the federal level (such as the issue of a fundamentally different approach to organizing health-care in the Arctic). We would like to add that since the Arctic issues are an inherent part of the developments in Russia in general, it's necessary to amend federal laws, including for the purposes of developing the Russian Arctic zone from beyond its territory. We believe that it's only possible on the condition that legal tools for implementing Presidential Decree no 204 “On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Russian Federation through to 2024” of May 7, 2018, are developed in the near future, with due consideration for specific features of different parts of the Russian Arctic macroregion.

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