

Prospects for Sino-Russian Cooperation in the Development and Commercial Use of the Northern Sea Route (Summary)

VORONENKO Alexandr

Senior Expert, Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Asia-Pacific Region Research Centre, Khabarovsk State University of Economics and Law, Khabarovsk, Russia

Today, the transport potential of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is attracting growing attention. Although its commercial significance is relatively low at present, it could, with proper development, become one of the main transport corridors between Asia and Europe, due to its advantages over traditional routes via the Suez and Panama canals. The NSR is 2,440 nautical miles shorter than the Suez route, cutting the journey time by 10 days and saving approximately 800 tons of fuel for an average vessel.

China and Russia are considered likely to be the main players in the process of developing the NSR. Both countries could benefit from undertaking development jointly. For China, as Europe's largest trading partner, the option of using polar waters has great significance, not only because of the reduction in distance, but also because the NSR creates opportunities for diversification and will improve the reliability of Chinese shipments. The opening of commercial navigation will provide additional impetus to China's export-oriented economy and will allow further diversification of energy resource supply routes to China, including resources from Arctic deposits. Moreover,

China, as a major shipbuilding country, can benefit from building and maintaining the ice class cargo fleet needed for the NSR. In addition, Dalian and other ports in Northeastern China could serve as hub-ports for the polar route. For Russia, increasing commercial use of the NSR would mean not only regular revenue from vessel transit, but also expands the options for supplying its northern territories, opens up possibilities for exporting mineral resources from Arctic deposits, and provides additional impetus for socioeconomic growth in Russia's polar regions.

With this in mind, Sino-Russian cooperation in the sphere of NSR development looks natural and organic. Russia's huge experience coupled with Chinese technological and scientific potential will give the required boost to commercial shipments in polar waters, for all interested parties. This report sets out the main prospects for Sino-Russian cooperation in polar waters, along with potential problems.

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