1.2 International cooperation among northern regions as a factor in improving the level and quality of life

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Introduction

In recent years, there have been many efforts to strengthen international co-operation between and among governments and organizations across the circumpolar north. Particular attention in this chapter is paid to the Russian Federation's role and participation in international projects supporting the development of local self-government for the conservation of the natural environment and the development of northern areas.

The main motivating factors for international cooperation in the northern regions of the world include a common desire to improve the level and quality of life, to protect the natural environment of the Arctic region, to preserve the Indigenous peoples of the North and their traditional cultural and economic activities based on the land and the use of natural resources. The responsible planning and management of development in northern territories, the purity of the Arctic seas and the northern rivers, and the preservation of reindeer pastures and surface tundra soils all directly affect the health and life expectancy of Indigenous peoples. They also help to protect the region's biodiversity.

Increased concern about the vulnerability of the Arctic's natural environment, the need to protect its unique biological resources, as well as the economic and scientific significance of the Arctic all dictate the need for concerted action among those states bordering the circumpolar north. Specifically, attention is need to the study of the flora and fauna of the Arctic and the impact of anthropogenic pollution on the quality of life of ethnic groups living here.

International Cooperation and the Russian Context

International cooperation in the polar regions of Russia was already a top initiative of the Soviet government in 1987 ("Murmansk MS Gorbachev's initiatives"). Development of international cooperation in the northern regions of Russia was due to growing environmental problems, transboundary air pollution associated with intensive development of mineral and energy resources, the creation of large-scale mining and metals production, oil production and refining, pulp and paper production, and energy complexes. There were also concerns about the disposal of liquid and solid radioactive waste. The seriousness of the effects of pollution in the Arctic have been realized by all the northern states.

In 1989, Finland offered to host a conference that would focus on the protection of the Arctic environment. This idea was endorsed by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Canada, Norway, the Soviet Union, the United States, and Sweden. The first preparatory meeting was held in Rovaniemi (Finland) in September 1989. This marked the beginning of "Rovaniemi process."

The first "State of the Arctic Environment" reports were presented at the First Ministerial Conference of the Arctic in Rovaniemi in June 1991. This activity marked the beginning of international cooperation in the field of protection of the natural environment of the Arctic. This process, and these reports, were subsequently adopted by all participants into Nordic Strategy for protection of the natural environment of the Arctic (AEPS). The purpose of the AEPS was made clear in the Declaration of Rovaniemi, as follows:

- Protect Arctic ecosystems and the local population;
- Ensure the protection, improvement and restoration of the environment and rational use of natural resources, including their use of local and Indigenous peoples of the Arctic;
- Take into account the traditional and cultural needs, values and way of life of Indigenous peoples;
- Regularly review the state of the environment in the Arctic;
- Identify, reduce and eliminate pollution.

To implement the Nordic Strategy, five working groups were established:

1) Arctic Monitoring and Assessment (AMAP), which would lead monitoring of a number of anthropogenic pollutants and evaluate their impact on all natural systems in the Arctic;
2) Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), within which was organized mechanisms for the exchange of information, and coordination of research, on biological species and habitats inclusive of Arctic flora and fauna;
3) The prevention, preparedness, and response to emergencies (EPPR) working group brought together experts to prepare the frameworks needed for international cooperation in the event of environmental threats or emergencies in the Arctic;
4) Protection of the marine environment of the Arctic (PAME), which led the development and adoption of preventive and other measures that would be implemented directly, or through competent international organizations, with respect to mitigating marine pollution in the Arctic;
5) The Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), where there was a preparation of proposals for measures that governments should take to fulfill their obligations in relation to sustainable development in the Arctic.

After the first Ministerial Conference of the Arctic in Rovaniemi, there were two more AEPS conferences - Nuuk (Greenland) in 1993 and Inuvik (Canada) in 1996. On September 19, 1996 in Ottawa (Canada), the foreign ministers of the eight Arctic countries - Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia, the United States, Finland, and Sweden - signed the “Ottawa Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council”. The purpose of the Artic Council was to promote cooperation, coordination, and integration of the Arctic countries, with the participation of Indigenous communities and other Arctic residents to address common environmental concerns and problems based on practices of sustainable development and environmental protection. After this time, the AEPS program was brought under the auspices of the Arctic Council and the activities and actions of the relevant working groups has continued.

Fragile Arctic Human and Natural Systems

The special nature of the Arctic is that even a weak effect can result in a significant disruption of fragile ecosystems, the effects of which may cover large areas and may last for a very long

time (sometimes for hundreds of years). The fragility of the Arctic environment, combined with the huge potential for transboundary environmental damage, underscores the importance and need hasten in the shortest possible time the transition to sustainable development within the region in which priority attention should be given to the balance of anthropogenic environmental loading and the carrying capacity of particular natural habitats.

Governments around the circumpolar north have, at the end of the Twentieth Century, stepped up their activities in the field of environmental protection of the Arctic. Against a backdrop of climate change and research into environmental impacts from industrial processes and pollutants, work is underway to increase protection of the Arctic from local and global sources of pollution. How important is it to preserve the ecosystem of the Arctic? We have learned a great deal about its importance based on major oil spills in Alaska and Siberia, as well as the damaging evidence of accumulation in the Arctic food chain of organochlorine pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) which have been brought by water and air mass circulation from more southern regions of the globe.

In October 2002, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) presented to the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council. They tabled a report titled “Arctic Pollution 2002”, that had been compiled over the previous 5 year period by 250 experts from the member countries of the Arctic Council (Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia, the United States, Finland, and Sweden) as well as countries with observer status in the Arctic Council. The report provides an assessment of how the transport of pollutants (heavy metals, radionuclides, etc..) is happening, their levels and changes in those levels, and the impact on ecosystems and human health in the Arctic. The report noted that, despite the fact that most of the sources of pollution are far beyond the Arctic, they are transported by air masses, and sea and river currents, and they accumulate in the food chain and adversely affect the health of the population of the North, especially Indigenous peoples.

Interdependence and international cooperation

The Arctic is a complex system of interacting regions. It is challenged by the contradictions and problems of creating and managing a functional development economy under the modern conditions of globalization and internationalization. For the foreseeable future, studies of issues related to inter-regional cooperation, about the effective use of natural resources, about the

spatial distribution of social and economic resources, and about the protection of long-term values are all vital for Russia. This can include international cooperation in studying the experiences of other countries and what they have done in relation to their northern territories in the development and implementation of social policies that contribute to improving the level and quality of life in the Arctic. Looking at these questions for local communities and for regions can support a better understanding of impacts on topics like the economic way of life, the customs of the local population, the mental health and well-being of the society, and the sustainability of traditions.

In the northern regions, especially in the Arctic, interdependence is clearly manifested due to the unity of the natural environment and the concentration of the unique spiritual and cultural traditions of the peoples of the North. Development of these areas takes place in the framework of sustainable development, the essence of which will require a sequential behaviour change in society and for individuals in relation to how we use and value natural resources and the environment. This sequential behaviour change should be planned and implemented for the benefit of future generations.

International cooperation in the development of oil and gas resources in the Arctic, the harmonization of the laws of the Arctic countries in the field of ecology, exchanging experiences in managing the development of sparsely populated Arctic settlements, understanding the integration into the market economy of the Aboriginal population, determining responsibility and management structures of power, and the strengthening of international ties all open up great opportunities for social and economic development in the northern regions.

Advancement and progress in recent years has come because of the development and work of northern regional associations. In all their diversity and specificity, they are an important part of the integration process. They fulfill their role in the implementation of the main goals and objectives of this process by working at the scale of a particular region, and they create an atmosphere of good-neighborliness and trust, and they contribute to economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation.

Closing

International relations are important to develop at the federal, regional, and municipal levels. Northern international cooperation shows worldwide responsibility in the management of development in the region, and demonstrates the value of rational approaches to political, social, and economic issues. International cooperation in northern regions intensifies the processes of exchange of scientific information and innovative technologies in the management of the economic and social spheres, maintains a single integrated environmental and economic monitoring of the Arctic, and directly affects the quality and standard of living of the population of the circumpolar North.

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