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### Cooperation between Russia and China in Arctic Shipping: Current State and Prospects\*

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**Abstract.** The article analyzes the cooperation between China and Russia in the field of Arctic shipping. The author compares the tasks of the Northern Sea Route development and the Ice Silk Road construction. This allows identifying the factors that promote and hinder cooperation. The author examines the specifics of the Sino-Russian format of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction that helps to mitigate contradictions between the national interests of the two states. The author examines the current cooperation between Russia and China in the field of Arctic shipping, identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in key areas of interaction (SWOT analysis). The author concludes that differences between interests and status of the two states in the Arctic provides Russia a strategic advantage in its relations with the PRC. This balance may be maintained within the framework of a multilateral cooperation. At the same time, cooperation with China in the field of marine security is promising in case of keeping existing power balance. In conclusion, the author suggests areas for cooperation to increase the effectiveness of bilateral interaction in the field of Arctic shipping.

**Keywords:** Arctic, Russian-Chinese relations, strategic partnership, Arctic shipping, Northern Sea Route, Ice Silk Road.

#### Introduction

Partnership between Russia and China in the second decade of the 2000s has proven to be one of the most fruitful bilateral formats. Russia attaches great importance to relations with the PRC. In the context of aggravated global problems, China's assertive attitude to supporting good-neighbourliness, building equal and respectful relations and developing bilateral trade, taking into account the complementarity of the economies, is extremely important to Moscow. Both countries share similar views on the problems of international relations and emphasize the inadmissibility of economic sanctions that endanger the well-being of people [1, Luzyanin S.G., p. 578; 2, Ershov V.F., p. 808].

The bilateral partnership covers many areas, and one of the most successful examples is cooperation in the Arctic: resource extraction and shipping development. The Arctic and new sea trade routes, in turn, are of strategic importance for international trade and security [3, Konyshov V.N., Sergunin A.A., p. 43, 52]. In this regard, the international community is increasingly concerned about the further rapprochement of the two states in the field of economic and military

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cooperation in the region, up to the formation of an alliance [4, Conley H.A., Melino M., p. 25–26]<sup>1</sup>. Most experts believe that such a scenario can be realized only partially, since the interests of Russia and China in the region largely contradict each other [5, Bertelsen R G., Gallucci V., p. 244; 6, Østreng W. et al., p. 75]. There is also a difference in the motives of the two actors. The key reason for Russia's increased cooperation with China was the sanctions against Moscow imposed in connection with the Ukrainian crisis. The PRC, on the other hand, began its journey to the Arctic long before that. In an effort to join the development of resources and new sea routes, China has built relations with all Arctic countries, not focusing exclusively on the Russian Federation. The global infrastructure initiative “One Belt, One Road” announced in 2013 gradually became a conceptual support for this activity, and in relation to shipping was formed as the idea of building the “Ice Silk Road” [7, Lanteigne M., p. 3; 8, Sørensen C. T. N., Klimenko E., p. 37–39].

Russian and Chinese experts studying the potential of bilateral cooperation in the region also point to the ambiguous nature of the interaction. In general, giving a positive assessment of the joint development of the Arctic and shipping, experts emphasize the need for Moscow to maintain independence from China [9, Konyshov V.N., Sergunin A.A., p. 6; 10, Voronenko A.L., p. 301; 11, Morozov Yu.V., p. 30–32; 12, Aleksandrov O.B., p. 35; 13, Liu H., p. 117; 14, Dow B., p. 70–71]<sup>2</sup>. Russian scientists suggest that China's interests in expanding the rights of non-Arctic states may threaten the policy of the Russian Federation and, in particular, its sovereignty in the Arctic [15, Khramchikhin A.A., p. 94–96]<sup>3</sup>. In turn, Chinese experts discuss the reliability of Russia as a partner in the Arctic, noting Russia's suspicion about the presence of the PRC in the Far North and, in general, preference to cooperate with European partners [16, Dun Ts., Lukin A.L., p. 162].

Since the experts are mainly focused on studying the difference between the interests of the two states in the Arctic, the new format of “comprehensive partnership” and its role in building bilateral cooperation mechanisms remain outside the scope of research. The real state of affairs in the development of shipping in the Russian Arctic often remains an auxiliary argument rather than a subject of detailed research. In this regard, the purpose of this work is to assess the level and prospects of cooperation between Russia and China in the field of Arctic shipping. Research objectives:

- Determine which national interests support the possibility of cooperation between the two countries in the development of Arctic shipping;

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<sup>1</sup> Federation of American Scientists. Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress. Report. Congressional Research Service. URL: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41153.pdf> (accessed 08 December 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Chen S., Zhang T. Ice Silk Road. URL: [http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2018-06/25/content\\_53369435.htm](http://russian.china.org.cn/exclusive/txt/2018-06/25/content_53369435.htm) (accessed 12 December 2019); Liu Nengye. Zhongguo de xin sichou zhi lu he beiji [China's New Silk Road and the Arctic]. URL: <http://www.polaroceanportal.com/article/1537> (accessed 15 October 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Gudev P. Arkticheskie ambitsii Podnebesnoy. Rossiya v global'noy politike [Gudev P. Arctic Ambitions of China. Russia in Global Affairs]. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/number/Arkticheskie-ambitsii-Podnebesnoi-19751> (accessed 15 August 2019).

- Explore what opportunities for the development of bilateral cooperation arise due to the format of comprehensive partnership and strategic interaction;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats for interaction between Russia and China in the development of shipping in the Arctic.

Research materials include sources in English, Russian and Chinese, including official documents and statements published on the official websites of ministries of foreign affairs, state councils, governments, as well as scientific publications. Key research methods are comparative analysis to study the interests of countries in the Arctic and SWOT analysis to assess the achievements and shortcomings of bilateral cooperation in the field of shipping.

### *Comparison of the national interests of Russia and China in the Arctic*

Today, Russia and China announced large-scale plans for the development of shipping in the Arctic: Russian, for the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), and the Chinese, for the construction of the Ice Silk Route (ISR). Comparison of the two initiatives will clarify how their goals coincide and whether their harmonious interaction is possible.

The Russian project is inextricably linked to the task of the country's survival and well-being. The development of the NSR is designed to strengthen the Russian economy and solve the problem of manageability of the resource-rich regions of Siberia and the Far East. The NSR should become a key highway for the new logistics of vast territories: to increase their interconnection, to ensure the possibility of building enterprises, delivering products to domestic and international consumers. For this reason, the key criterion for any project in the Russian Arctic is the ability to “load” the NSR in order to reach the threshold of 80 million tons of cargo transported annually by 2024<sup>4</sup>.

The designated goal turns out to be related to the problems of regional security, both traditional and non-traditional. The long coastline of the Russian Arctic is a natural border. Threats of terrorism, illegal immigration, poaching, smuggling and environmental pollution require an increased focus on securing the areas, developing the adjacent infrastructure and a network of search and rescue stations. In addition, Arctic shipping routes go around territories that are extremely important for the country's strategic security. This makes a special impact on Russia's cooperation in the development of Arctic shipping with any state, including the PRC [5, Bertelsen R.G., Gallucci V., 244–245]<sup>5</sup>. In particular, the priority for Russia is to maintain a “zone of peace” in

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<sup>4</sup> Президент подписал Указ «О национальных целях и стратегических задачах развития Российской Федерации на период до 2024 года» [The President Signed the Decree "On National Goals and Strategic Objectives of the Development of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2024"]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/57425> (accessed 12 October 2020).

<sup>5</sup> The Naval Doctrine of the Russian Federation, Approved by the President of the Russian Federation No. Pr-1210 of July 26, 2015. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/uAFi5nvux2twaqjftS5yriZUVTJan77L.pdf> (accessed 18 October 2020).

the region. For this reason, Russia adheres to a defensive strategy and disapproves of the excessive militarization of the region [17, Burilkov A., Geise T., p. 1046–1047] <sup>6</sup>.

Finally, in the international arena, the development of the NSR increases the value of Russia as a reliable partner capable of implementing long-term projects in the Far North. In this regard, we can agree with the opinion of K. Voronov, an expert at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, that the Arctic is the very field where Russia de facto plays the role of a great power <sup>7</sup>. This explains why Moscow is making so many efforts to develop the NSR, despite the high cost and difficulty of working in Arctic waters <sup>8</sup>.

As for the Chinese initiative “Ice Silk Road”, it reflects, first of all, the global ambitions of the PRC [18, Sun Y., p. 15]. Comparing them with the tasks that the Arctic shipping allows Russia to solve, we note that the PRC is also interested in taking advantage of economic opportunities. Shipping can become a new source of energy resources, which will not depend on the “Malacca Strait dilemma” and piracy in the waters of Somalia [19, Li Chzh, Hu M., p. 429, 437; 20, Lanteigne M., p. 143]. In addition, the Arctic shipping will give impetus to the development of Northeast China, the ports of which will receive ships on Arctic voyages. All these opportunities are of interest to the PRC in the medium term, since right now the Chinese fleet is not technically ready to get involved in the development of the Arctic.

As well as for Russia, shipping can increase the national security of the PRC within the framework of its rivalry with the United States and its allies [21, Zhang Ts., Huang D., p. 75–77]. Although China's key interests are related to the Asia-Pacific region, and not the Arctic, the passage of ships through the Bering Strait, the use of the coastline and the Far Eastern ports of Russia for the delivery of goods can help overcome the limitation of the First and Second chain of islands [17, Burilkov A., Geise T., p. 1046–1047; 22, Cole D.B., p. 129]. In this regard, the natural choice for Beijing is to cooperate with Russia and, as far as possible, maintain a constructive relationship with the United States. In this regard, China has taken the following position: to participate in rescue and military operations affecting the national interests of the PRC, and to provide its capital, market, knowledge, technology and experience to “promote peace and security in the Arctic” <sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2020 and Beyond. URL: <http://static.government.ru/media/files/A4qP6brLNJ175I40U0K46x4SsKRHGfUO.pdf> (accessed 02 October 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Voronov K. ES, Kitay, Rossiya i Arktika: strategicheskie imperativy. Rossiyskiy sovet po mezhdunarodnym delam [EU, China, Russia and the Arctic: Strategic Imperatives. Russian Council on International Affairs]. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/arctic/es-kitay-rossiya-i-arktika-strategicheskie-imperativy/> (accessed 09 October 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Utverzhden plan razvitiya infrastruktury Severnogo morskogo puti do 2035 goda [Infrastructure Development Plan for the Northern Sea Route up to 2035 was Approved]. URL: <http://government.ru/docs/38714/> (accessed 31 December 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China. “Full Text: China's Arctic Policy,” 26 January 2018. URL: [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm) (accessed 13 October 2020); Shouquan fabu: Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia anquan fa [Authorized Release: National Security Law of the People's Republic of China]. URL: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-07/01/c\\_1115787801.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-07/01/c_1115787801.htm) (accessed 04 February 2018).

Finally, from a political point of view, the idea of the ISR has shaped the PRC's view of cooperation in the Arctic as an all-encompassing one, for the benefit of all countries. Now, even in the Arctic, China has declared itself as a “responsible power” capable of proposing an inclusive development strategy. This step is consistent with China's intention to become one of the world's leading states, displacing the United States. To this end, China intends to influence the existing international rules established within the bipolar and then unipolar world.

For this reason, sea transportation has become the main idea around which Beijing's Arctic policy is being built. Lacking territories in the Arctic Circle, China has no hope of influencing the rules for resource extraction. However, the text of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, a key document governing shipping, allows China to debate its legal rights in the region and the issue of freedom of navigation<sup>10</sup>. In an effort to strengthen its position, the PRC called itself “a country close to the Arctic” and, accordingly, has the right to participate in solving the problems of the region. Thus, the ISR became China's claim to a new status in the Arctic: without an application for sovereignty, but with an emphasis on legal rights and, in particular, the right to be considered an important Arctic actor.

In order not to miss the aforementioned opportunities, China has actively joined the participation in shipping. Thanks to the efforts of the Arctic and Antarctic Affairs Administration and COSCO, the flagship company of China's polar commercial shipping, the country regularly conducts research and commercial voyages. To date, the PRC already has two diesel-electric icebreakers (the modernized former Soviet ship “Snow Dragon” and built in the PRC “Snow Dragon 2”). In addition, a nuclear icebreaker is expected to be built. However, these vessels make up the research fleet. Commercial shipping is still in its infancy due to the lack of its own ice-class vessels and specialized ports.

Comparing the interests of Russia and China in the field of Arctic shipping, it can be seen that the initiatives for the development of the NSR and the construction of the ISR overlap. Both are aimed at connecting the European and Asian markets and both are capable of accelerating the economic development of the regions of the two countries. For Moscow, China is one of the most promising partners along with South Korea and Japan. For Beijing, cooperation with Russia on the NSR is the most feasible alternative, since the Russian fairway is better developed than other Arctic routes<sup>11</sup>. However, both projects independently serve the interests of Russia and China, and the partners strive to maintain independence in everything, from the diversification of economic cooperation to the training of personnel and the preference of the national language for navigation aids<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Full Text: Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, 20 June 2017. URL: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/20/c\\_136380414.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-06/20/c_136380414.htm) (accessed 28 May 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Zasedanie kruglogo stola foruma «Odin poyas, odin put'» [Roundtable Meeting of the Forum "One Belt, One Road"]. 27 April 2019. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60393> (accessed 20 January 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Cai M. COSCO. Arctic Circle. 2015. URL: <https://vimeo.com/144905938> (accessed 07 December 2019).

The security sphere, in turn, accumulates contradictions of interests to the greatest extent. The Arctic is a region where Russia has a strategic advantage over China. In this regard, the Russian Federation is not interested in the significant involvement of China in the sphere of Arctic security. The possible exploit of dual-use technologies by the PRC, for example, in the course of hydroacoustic research of the Arctic Ocean, is also the reason for the wary attitude of the Russian side<sup>13</sup>. An additional burden on the development of relations is imposed by interaction in a completely different part of the world: on the border of two countries and in the Asia-Pacific region [17, Burilkov A., Geise T., p. 1046]<sup>14</sup>.

At the same time, there are arguments in favor of cooperation. First, there is a shared interest in technological development. In this regard, countries are participating in initiatives that can increase the connectivity and information security of the region. For example, Russia and China intend to join an international project to lay fiber-optic cables along the bottom of the Arctic seas. Bilateral cooperation in the field of remote sensing between GLONASS and BeiDou also has the potential to improve the safety and quality of navigation in the Arctic.

Second, confrontation with the United States is pushing for security rapprochement<sup>15</sup>. It is important that if Russia is not interested in strengthening the PRC as a military power in the Arctic, then for China maximizing Russian military power in the region may be beneficial. In case of a conflict with the United States, China will be able to rely on the supply of products through the territory of the Russian Federation, including using the Arctic infrastructure [23, Pan Ts., Lu Ts., p. 118, 122]<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, due to the indicated significant contradictions, cooperation with China remains very limited in the field of military security in the Arctic, search and rescue, maritime security, and in related areas.

The political dimension of cooperation is also not uniquely favorable. On the one hand, partnership in the Arctic helps to strengthen the positions of both states in the international system, which China and Russia want to see as multipolar [24, Lagutina M., Leksyutina Y., p. 46–47]. At the same time, there are a number of contradictions. First, the key position of China, connected with the idea of expanding the rights of non-Arctic states in the Arctic, with the leading role of

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<sup>13</sup> Koh S.L.C. China's strategic interest in the Arctic goes beyond economics. URL: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/05/11/chinas-strategic-interest-in-the-arctic-goes-beyond-economics/> (accessed 18 May 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Dopolnitel'noe soglasenie mezhdu Rossiyskoy Federatsiyey i Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respublikoy o rossiysko-kitayskoy gosudarstvennoy granitse na ee Vostochnoy chasti [Additional Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the Russian-Chinese State Border on Its Eastern Part]. URL: <http://docs.cntd.ru/document/901945334> (accessed 13 November 2019).

<sup>15</sup> The Guardian. Joint Russian and Chinese Air Patrol Heightens Tension in Korean Peninsula. July 24, 2019. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/24/joint-russian-and-chinese-air-patrol-heightens-tension-in-korean-peninsula> (accessed 07 November 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Zasedanie diskussionnogo kluba «Valday». Vladimir Putin vystupil na itogovoy plenarnoy sessii XVI zasedaniya Mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba «Valday» [Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club. Vladimir Putin Spoke at the Final Plenary Session of the 16th Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61719> (accessed 17 December 2019).

China as a “responsible power”, completely contradicts the interests of the Russian Federation. Secondly, for Russia, the development of the NSR is a sensitive topic of domestic policy, as it concerns the life and way of life of people living in the Arctic. In this regard, any political decisions of the Russian leadership have far-reaching consequences, including when it comes to closer cooperation with Beijing. For China, however, the Arctic remains a low-risk area.

### *Cooperation in a partnership format*

The partnership format has provided favorable opportunities for cooperation between Russia and China in the field of Arctic shipping. One of the reasons is the flexibility of interaction conditions: the partners are not bound by rigid obligations, which means they can pursue a pragmatic policy without compromising either interests or principles [25, Feng H., p. 9; 26, Korolev A., Portyakov V., p. 418]<sup>17</sup>. It was the approach that allowed the two countries to make a decision to pair the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative (despite the contradictions in the interests of the two countries in Central Asia) [27, Alexeeva O., Lasserre F., p. 279–282; 28, Gabuev A., p. 62–63]. This large-scale process now includes the development of the Arctic sea routes<sup>18</sup>.

Another reason for the format's effectiveness is active support of the leaders of the two countries, which provided a stable background for cooperation<sup>19</sup>. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the active position of the Russian leadership. The new policy associated with entering the Asian markets and the development of the territories of Siberia and the Far East, the so-called “turn to the East”, made the development of the NSR an economic dominant in the Asian direction [29, Pestsov S.K., Volynchuk A.B., p. 85; 30, Sevastyanov S.V., Kravchuk A.A., p. 8–9]. China's cross-border relations are considered today as part of new logistics, and two key projects, transport corridors Primorye-1 and Primorye-2, turned out to be associated with the development of the Northern Sea Route<sup>20</sup>.

The partnership format contributed to the signing of a number of documents that included the Arctic as one of the areas of focus. In early 2003, the study of the Arctic was mentioned in the Agreement on Cooperation in the Study and Use of the World Ocean, and this document laid the

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<sup>17</sup> Wen Stresses Importance of Developing China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. URL: [http://en.people.cn/200405/07/eng20040507\\_142556.html](http://en.people.cn/200405/07/eng20040507_142556.html) (accessed 05 September 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Kitay i Rossiya idut v nogu so vremenem [China and Russia Keep Pace with the Times]. URL: <https://tass.ru/interviews/6504703> (accessed 07 July 2019).

<sup>19</sup> Sovmestnoe zayavlenie Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki o razvitii otnosheniy vseob"emlyushchego partnerstva i strategicheskogo vzaimodeystviya, vstupayushchikh v novuyu epokhu [Joint Statement by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the Development of Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Interaction Relations Entering a New Era]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5413> (accessed 06 December 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Programma razvitiya rossiysko-kitayskogo sotrudnichestva v torgovo-ekonomicheskoy i investitsionnoy sferakh na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossiyskoy Federatsii na 2018–2024 gody [Program for the development of Russian-Chinese Cooperation in Trade, Economic and Investment Spheres in the Far East of the Russian Federation for 2018–2024]. URL: <http://russian.mofcom.gov.cn/article/speechheader/201811/20181102808776.shtml> (accessed 14 April 2019).

foundation for further steps<sup>21</sup>. Subsequently, cooperation in the Arctic was included in a number of joint statements from 2017, 2018 and 2019, and the two states agreed to support agencies and companies involved in the development of the NSR and adjacent infrastructure<sup>22</sup>. The 2019 Joint Statement noted that cooperation would be “based on rights and interests of the coastal state”<sup>23</sup>. This was a significant concession from the PRC, in comparison with its earlier declarations about freedom of navigation<sup>24</sup>.

Finally, the development of bilateral partnerships facilitated the strengthening of existing bilateral cooperation mechanisms and the creation of new ones, including those in the Arctic [31, Sergunin A., Konyshev V., 79; 32, Kobzeva, M., p. 100–101]. The main venues were the meetings of the Legal Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the Treaty and Legal Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Russian-Chinese Commission for the preparation of regular meetings of heads of government. Within their framework, issues of shipping, maritime law and dispute settlement in the Arctic are discussed. An additional contribution is made by the Intergovernmental Russian-Chinese Commission for Cooperation and Development of the Far East and the Baikal Region of the Russian Federation and the North-East of the People's Republic of China<sup>25</sup>. Significant support is provided by investment structures and corporations aimed at promoting the implementation of infrastructure projects in Russia, including in the Arctic zone<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Soglasenie mezhdru Pravitel'stvom Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Pravitel'stvom Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki o sotrudnichestve v oblasti issledovaniya i ispol'zovaniya Mirovogo okeana [Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on Cooperation in the Exploration and Use of the World Ocean]. URL: [http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/international\\_contracts/2\\_contract/-/storage-viewer/bilateral/PAGE-166/46213](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/international_contracts/2_contract/-/storage-viewer/bilateral/PAGE-166/46213) (accessed 16 May 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Sovmestnoe zayavlenie Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki o dal'neyshem uglublenii otnosheniy vseob"emlyushchego partnerstva i strategicheskogo vzaimodeystviya [Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the Further Deepening of Relations of Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Interaction]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5218> (accessed 16 January 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Sovmestnoe zayavlenie Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki o razvitii otnosheniy vseob"emlyushchego partnerstva i strategicheskogo vzaimodeystviya, vstupayushchikh v novuyu epokhu [Joint Statement by the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the Development of Comprehensive Partnership and Strategic Interaction Relations Entering a New Era]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5413> (accessed 06 December 2019).

<sup>24</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China. “Full Text: China's Arctic Policy,” 26 January 2018. URL: [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm) (accessed 13 October 2020).

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. Consultation Between Director-Generals of the Departments of Treaty and Law of Ministries of Foreign Affairs of China and Russia Held in Moscow. URL: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjbxw/t1337836.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1337836.shtml) (accessed 05 August 2018); Sostoyalos' vtroe zasedanie Mezhravitel'svennoy rossiysko-kitayskoy komissii po sotrudnichestvu i razvitiyu Dal'nego Vostoka i Baykal'skogo regiona Rossiyskoy Federatsii i Severo-Vostoka Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki [The Second Meeting of the Intergovernmental Russian-Chinese Commission on Cooperation and Development of the Far East and the Baikal Region of the Russian Federation and the North-East of the People's Republic of China was Held]. URL: <http://government.ru/news/33726/> (accessed 06 September 2020).

<sup>26</sup> Russian-Chinese Investment Fund for Regional Development. URL: <http://ifrd.ru/ru/> (accessed 03 October 2020); COSCO SHIPPING Attended the 6th Meeting of the China-Russia Investment Cooperation Committee. URL: <https://en.portnews.ru/news/287783/> (accessed 15 August 2020); VTB i VEB podpisali soglasheniya s China Develop-

A special area of bilateral cooperation also arises due to the interaction of the local administrations of Russia and China, interested in the development of Arctic shipping. Arkhangelsk Oblast, Komi Republic, Murmansk Oblast, Yakutia, Primorskiy Krai are developing relations with the provinces of Heilongjiang and Jilin [33, Ivanov S.A., 416–417]. The Russian side is looking for investments in ports and complex infrastructure projects<sup>27</sup>. In turn, Chinese partners from the border provinces are presenting cooperation with Russia as part of “One Belt, One Road” and ISR Initiatives, thereby hoping to attract additional state support<sup>28</sup>.

### *Assessment of cooperation in the field of shipping in the Russian Arctic*

The political component of bilateral cooperation is somewhat ahead of the true scale of China's involvement. It should be admitted that the development of Arctic shipping is mainly due to Russian ships delivering LNG and other cargo to China and back. Only a small part, no more than 1.2% of the total number of voyages on the NSR, is made by Chinese ships<sup>29</sup>. The partnership itself is still focused on infrastructure projects — that is, on preparing for future active navigation.

In general, three conditional regions can be distinguished where most of the discussed and current Russian-Chinese projects are concentrated: the region of the White and Barents Seas, the Kara Sea and the Sea of Japan. The first and last regions are the gates of the Russian Arctic to Europe and Asia, and the central region, where the largest mining projects are concentrated, serves as a strong point for both the ISR and the NSR. This distribution reflects the inextricable link between the shipping and extractive industries.

Among the three regions, the most successful is the Kara Sea with the largest infrastructure project, the port of Sabetta. The port unites the cargo flows of two projects: Yamal LNG (China's

ment Bank [VTB and VEB Signed Agreements with China Development Bank]. URL: <http://www.finmarket.ru/currency/news/4406111> (accessed 19 October 2020).

<sup>27</sup> Kitay planiruet zadeystvovat' port Murmansk dlya tranzita tovarov [China Plans to Use the Port of Murmansk for the Transit of Goods]. URL: <https://severpost.ru/read/44732/> (accessed 06 November 2020); Vlasti Primorya predlozhili Kitayu uchastvovat' v stroitel'stve porta dlya tranzita gruzov cherez SMP [Primorye Authorities Invited China to Participate in the Construction of a Port for the Transit of Goods through the NSR]. URL: <https://www.interfax-russia.ru/far-east/news/vlasti-primorya-predlozhili-kitayu-uchastvovat-v-stroitelstve-porta-dlya-tranzita-gruzov-cherez-smp> (accessed 18 October 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Jiakuai jianshe san qiao yi dao wanshan kou'an jichu sheshi cujin zhong e diqu jingmao hezuo dadao geng gao shuiping wangwentao chuxi 2019 nian di wu jie guoji beiji luntan quanti huiyi [Accelerating the Construction of Three Bridges and One Island, Improving Port Infrastructure and Promoting Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Russia to a Higher Level. Wang Wentao Attended the 2019 Plenary Session of the Fifth International Arctic Forum]. URL: <http://www.hlj.gov.cn/szf/system/2019/04/12/010897732.shtml> (accessed 17 September 2019); Haerbin Shi Zhang Song Xibin Huijian Mo'ermansike Daibiao Tuan [Meeting of the Mayor of Harbin Son Xibin with Murmansk Delegation]. URL: [http://js.hlj.gov.cn:82/js/detail?id=8add3897dc5d88fcd1e6d9c92f57e241&title=5ZOI5bCU5ruo5biC6ZW/5a6L5biM5paM5Lya6KeB5pGp5bCU5pu85pav5YWL5Luj6KGo5Zui&to=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5obGouZ292LmNuL3p3ZmIvc3lzdGVtLzlwMTcvMDgvMTUvMDEwODQyNjM5LnNodG1s&sid=\\$sid](http://js.hlj.gov.cn:82/js/detail?id=8add3897dc5d88fcd1e6d9c92f57e241&title=5ZOI5bCU5ruo5biC6ZW/5a6L5biM5paM5Lya6KeB5pGp5bCU5pu85pav5YWL5Luj6KGo5Zui&to=aHR0cDovL3d3dy5obGouZ292LmNuL3p3ZmIvc3lzdGVtLzlwMTcvMDgvMTUvMDEwODQyNjM5LnNodG1s&sid=$sid) (accessed 20 December 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Razresheniya na plavanie sudna v akvatorii Severnogo morskogo puti. Administratsiya Severnogo Morskogo puti [Permits for Navigation of the Vessel in the Water Area of the Northern Sea Route. Administration of the Northern Sea Route]. URL: [http://www.nsra.ru/ru/rassmotrenie\\_zayavleniy/razresheniya.html](http://www.nsra.ru/ru/rassmotrenie_zayavleniy/razresheniya.html) (accessed 18 June 2020); Gruzooborot portov Dal'nego Vostoka imeet bol'shoi potentsial rosta [The Cargo Turnover of the Ports of the Far East Has Great Growth Potential]. URL: <https://minvr.gov.ru/press-center/news/21572> (accessed 11 August 2020).

share is 29.9%) and the Arctic LNG-2 under construction (China's share is 20%)<sup>30</sup>. This is where the Russian-Chinese cooperation in the field of shipping is most productive. Within the framework of these projects, a number of Chinese companies are supplying Arctic LNG tankers, module carriers and the modules themselves<sup>31</sup>. A significant event was the establishment in 2019 of a joint company LLC Sea Arctic Transport (NOVATEK, Sovcomflot, China COSCO Shipping Corporation Limited and Silk Road Fund). The Russian-majority company will manufacture icebreaking tankers for the year-round transportation of hydrocarbons and cargo from Europe to Asia<sup>32</sup>.

The Sea of Japan region is more problematic. Mutual mistrust, accumulated over the long history of cross-border cooperation, hinders interaction, and many projects in the region have been idle for decades [34, Li Tsz., Zhan L., Ma P., p. 37]. However, the current active policy of Moscow on the development of the Far East helped to solve a number of problems of cross-border cooperation and introduced a new, Arctic direction [35, Petrakov V.V., Lukin A.L., p. 89]<sup>33</sup>. Two cross-border international transport corridors are now part of a new logistics system linking the European and Asian Arctic (Primorye-1 from Heilongjiang province through the ports of Vladivostok and Nakhodka and Primorye-2 from Jilin province through the port of Zarubino)<sup>34</sup>. The cooperation between Rosneft and the Chinese Shipbuilding Corporation on the construction of the Zvezda shipyard, which specializes in the construction of Arc7 ice-class gas carriers and other vessels and equipment for oil production and transportation, turned out to be successful<sup>35</sup>.

The least successful cooperation is in the White and Barents Seas. For several years, Chinese companies have been visiting the region, negotiating and signing agreements, but the im-

<sup>30</sup> Tovaroorobot cherez port Sabetta v 2016 g. uvelichilsya v 5 raz, do \$5,2 mlrd [Trade Turnover through the Port of Sabetta in 2016 Increased 5 times, to \$ 5.2 Billion]. URL: <https://tass.ru/transport/3927061> (accessed 10 April 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Kitay nachal postroyku moduley dlya "Arktik SPG-2" [China Starts Building Modules for "Arktik SPG-2"]. URL: <https://pro-arctic.ru/13/12/2019/news/38555> (accessed 01 June 2020); Kitay postroil dlya «Yamal SPG» pervyy v mire vsezonnyy arkticheskiy tanker [China Builds the World's First All-Season Arctic Tanker for "Yamal SPG"]. URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/economy/2533034.html> (accessed 14 June 2019); "Ya Ma'er, Chuli Beiji Quan De LNG Chaoji Gongcheng. [Yamal, a Super Complex Project for the Production of LNG in the Arctic Circle]." URL: <http://news.CNPC.com.cn/system/2017/04/01/001641559.shtml> (accessed 17 May 2017).

<sup>32</sup> «NOVATEK», COSCO SHIPPING, «Sovkomflot» i Fond Shelkovogo Puti podpisali soglasenie v otnoshenii OOO «Morskoy arkticheskiy transport» [NOVATEK, COSCO SHIPPING, Sovcomflot and the Silk Road Fund Signed an Agreement on Arctic Sea Transport LLC]. URL: [http://www.novatek.ru/ru/investors/events/archive/index.php?id\\_4=3243](http://www.novatek.ru/ru/investors/events/archive/index.php?id_4=3243) (accessed 14 June 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Plenarnoe zasedanie Vostochnogo ekonomicheskogo foruma [Plenary Session of the Eastern Economic Forum]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61451> (accessed 04 May 2020); Dokumenty, podpisannyye po itogam ofitsial'nogo vizita Predsedatelya Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki Si Tzin'pina v Rossiyskuyu Federatsiyu [Documents Signed Following the Official Visit of the President of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping to the Russian Federation]. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/5217> (accessed 04 August 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Gruzovuyu liniyu Khun'chun' – Zarubino – Ninbo ofitsial'no zapuskayut v Primorye [Freight Line Hunchun – Zarubino – Ningbo Officially Launched in Primorye]. URL: <https://www.primorsky.ru/news/150483/> (accessed 19 September 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Novyy etap stroitel'stva. Sudostroitel'nyy kompleks «Zvezda» [New Stage of Construction. Shipbuilding Complex "Zvezda"]. URL: <http://www.sskzvezda.ru/index.php/ru/8-news/142-novyj-etap-stroitelstva> (accessed 06 August 2020); «Rosneft»: mezhdunarodnoe sotrudnichestvo [Rosneft: International Cooperation]. URL: <https://actualcomment.ru/mezhdunarodnoe-sotrudnichestvo-rosnefti--1608101356.html> (accessed 16 February 2018).

plementation of projects (construction of the Belkomur railway, a deep-water port in the area of Mudyug Island, etc.) does not move forward. Even the Russian-Chinese working group, assembled in 2013 with the participation of the Ministry of Transport, the China Development Bank and other influential organizations of the two countries, did not produce significant results<sup>36</sup>.

The problem here, first of all, lies in the uncertainty of the Russian side in the payback of projects. The new plan for the development of the infrastructure of the Northern Sea Route up to 2035 provides for the completion of a number of infrastructure facilities within the Murmansk transport hub, but the construction of Belkomur and the development of the Murmansk port are considered as tasks for the future<sup>37</sup>. An additional obstacle is the presence of internal competition for investment between Murmansk and Arkhangelsk and potential external competition with the Norwegian port of Kirkenes, also aimed at obtaining Chinese investments [36, Zaykov K.S., p. 38–39]<sup>38</sup>.

This study allows us to consider the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the field of Arctic shipping (Table 1).

*Table 1*  
*SWOT analysis of Sino-Russian cooperation in shipping and infrastructure in the Russian Arctic*<sup>39</sup>

White Sea and Barents Sea	
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proactive attitude of the local administration and the constant interest of Chinese companies create the basis for further cooperation.</li> <li>• The long history of negotiations increases mutual awareness of the Chinese and Russian partners about each other's opportunities and challenges, as well as about future projects.</li> <li>• Projects are gradually receiving support from the country's leadership.</li> </ul>
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The political will of the Russian side has not yet been consolidated sufficiently to provide a clear roadmap for cooperation.</li> <li>• The risk is related to an extreme and fragile environment, current infrastructure problems and the negative impact of European sanctions on business in Russia.</li> </ul>
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The territorial proximity to Europe and the developed infrastructure (compared to other parts of the Russian Arctic) offers Russia and China a chance to establish links with European partners and create new Eurasian logistics through the Russian railways network.</li> </ul>
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The implementation of projects is highly dependent on political and economic relations with Europe. This could hinder bilateral plans and lead to possible competition between the priorities of Chinese investments, either in the renovated Russian ports, or in similar projects in Scandinavia.</li> </ul>
Kara Sea	
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG-2, combined with the construction of the Sabetta port, have become success stories for the leaders of both states in bilateral cooperation and multi-stakeholder engagement</li> </ul>

<sup>36</sup> "Belkomur" dast vozmozhnost' realizovat' bolee 40 krupnykh investproektov ["Belkomur" will Provide an Opportunity to Implement More than 40 Large Investment Projects]. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/4130386> (accessed 09 December 2019); Kitay zainteresovan v sotrudnichestve s Pomoryem v sfere morskikh perevozok [China is Interested in Cooperation with Pomorie in the Field of Sea Transportation]. URL: <http://dvinanews.ru/-s4yh4897> (accessed 08 November 2020)

<sup>37</sup> Utverzhden plan razvitiya infrastruktury Severnogo morskogo puti do 2035 goda [Infrastructure Development Plan for the Northern Sea Route up to 2035 Approved]. URL: <http://government.ru/docs/38714/> (accessed 07 March 2020); Nenuzhnaya doroga: za aktsiyami «Belkomura» opyat' nikto ne prishel [An Unnecessary Road: Again, No One Came for the Shares of Belkomur]. URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/2383716.html> (accessed 08 July 2020).

<sup>38</sup> The Dream of an Arctic Railway Fades as Sami Herders Signal 'Veto'. URL: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/life-and-public/2020/03/arctic-railway-dream-fades-away-sami-herders-announce-veto/> (accessed 16 May 2020).

<sup>39</sup> S – Strengths, W – Weaknesses; O – Opportunities; T – Threats.

	<p>with European and Asian partners in the Arctic. These facts strengthen the readiness for further cooperation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NOVATEK's projects receive sustained support from the Russian government, which is a long-term guarantee of stable profits.</li> <li>• Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG-2 share common infrastructure, which increases the return on investment.</li> </ul>
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The risk is related to the extreme and fragile environment, current infrastructure problems and the negative impact of European sanctions on business in Russia.</li> </ul>
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The scale and complexity of projects is a powerful incentive for Sino-Russian technological cooperation in various areas related to the development of the Arctic.</li> <li>• The natural resources of the region provide the basis for long-term activities in these areas.</li> </ul>
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The scale of the project determines its strong dependence on government support and stability in the Russian Federation.</li> </ul>
Sea of Japan	
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mild climate and territorial proximity to Asian ice-free ports favor cooperation.</li> <li>• Long-term cross-border cooperation ensures mutual understanding and provides well-functioning mechanisms of interaction.</li> </ul>
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of investment attractiveness of the region for Chinese investors and deep-rooted distrust of Chinese partners in the Far East hinder fruitful cooperation.</li> <li>• Clear separation of national interests of the two states in the Asia-Pacific region limits the scope of China's participation in regional development.</li> </ul>
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving regional development and connectivity: the link between the Arctic and the Far East in the case of Russia, the link between the Northeast and Arctic Eurasian logistics in the case of China.</li> <li>• Creating a production chain from Arctic hydrocarbons to reprocessed fuels for Asian markets — mainly in the interests of Russia.</li> </ul>
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependence of cooperation on the political situation: success or contradictions of cross-border relations and the situation in the Asia-Pacific region.</li> </ul>
Shipping in Russian waters	
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining experience in research and commercial shipping in Russian Arctic waters, including understanding of ice conditions, requirements for vessels and crews, and experience in dealing with Russian authorities.</li> <li>• Willingness to engage in dialogue regarding shipping conditions and regulations combined with the commitment of both countries to the existing legal framework.</li> </ul>
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is still a significant gap between year-round navigation requirements and the current state of the fleet and logistics.</li> </ul>
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China's ability to navigate the Russian Arctic confirms its status as an "important Arctic actor" and supports Russia's efforts to establish international shipping along the NSR.</li> <li>• New direction of technological and economic cooperation is available both for bilateral cooperation and for building new links between Europe, Russia and Asia.</li> </ul>
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal contradictions require a constant balance of interests and confidence-building measures in the long term.</li> <li>• Firm position of the Russian Federation regarding the legal regulation of the NSR and the need to control its own territories complicate cooperation with China on most security issues.</li> </ul>

The analysis shows that there are a number of internal factors in the White Sea and Barents Sea region that hinder cooperation, despite its favorable territorial location. The prospects for interaction between the two countries in the region are ambiguous. The Kara Sea region is an example of successful and stable cooperation: bilateral relations here do not depend on the problems inherent in border areas, and large-scale mining projects allow building interaction with a long-term perspective. Partnership in the Sea of Japan related to Arctic logistics still depends on cross-border cooperation and the need to take into account the interests of Japan, South Korea and the United States. In this regard, even non-Arctic-related issues may become an obstacle to interaction. Finally, the shipping itself is mainly carried out by the Russian fleet, which contributes

to the development of the Northern Sea Route. Chinese shipping in the Russian Arctic still retains its image value in promoting ISR and is not a source of significant economic benefits. In the future, cooperation will depend on the readiness of the Chinese partners to compromise on navigation rules in Russian waters.

### *Conclusions*

The partnership format contributes to the development of cooperation between Russia and China in the field of Arctic shipping. Thanks to new mechanisms of interaction and joint political decisions, the format provides a number of additional opportunities for dialogue and projects implementation. At the same time, bilateral cooperation is gradually concentrating around consonant initiatives: the development of the Northern Sea Route and the construction of the Ice Silk Road.

The interests of the two countries in the framework of the initiatives are fundamentally different. The national interest of Russia is to make the NSR a backbone of socio-economic development of the Arctic and a transport corridor from Europe to Asia. Russia needs good reasons to cooperate with China: projects that make a significant contribution to the development of resources and the country's economy. For China, a key incentive to participate in Arctic shipping is the development of new routes for trade with European countries and the delivery of resources. The PRC does not seek to limit itself to cooperation only with the Russian Federation or to invest in infrastructure fully managed by Moscow.

The contradictions between the national interests of Russia and the PRC are especially evident in the security sphere. This leads to political distance between countries and narrows the possible options for cooperation. Moreover, if maximizing China's influence in the Arctic contradicts Russia's interests, then maximizing Russia's influence does not necessarily contradict China's interests. This strategic advantage creates a favorable balance in Russia's interests.

It is important to note, however, that concerns about China's capabilities in the field of military security in the Arctic arise against the background of the absence of effective mechanisms for international cooperation. In this regard, the dialogue of key actors in the region, primarily Russia and the United States, as well as the joint development of interaction criteria can make a constructive contribution to relations with China in the field of Arctic shipping. At the same time, the radicalization of the US position towards Russia and the PRC in the Arctic and the lack of an effective dialogue with Washington can change the balance of power and induce Moscow and Beijing to make undesirable compromises for them. In order to avoid such a situation, it is advisable for Russia to take the initiative to develop an international dialogue on the safety of navigation in the Arctic. Namely, to pay active attention to the development of mechanisms for the management of marine resources in the Arctic Ocean, the exchange of observations of climate and ocean, as well as support for navigation. All these issues are important for the safety

of navigation on the NSR and can become the basis for fruitful cooperation between Russia and the PRC. Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council provides additional opportunities to stimulate multilateral dialogue, in which China can play an important, but not exclusive role, while remaining within the existing regime of Arctic governance.

In the political sphere, cooperation serves to form the national image of both Russia and China and contributes to the promotion of the idea of multipolarity. Since both initiatives (the development of the NSR and the construction of the ISR) are aimed at strengthening the interconnectedness of global markets, the warming of relations between Russia and the countries of Europe, and especially Northern Europe, can balance cooperation in the Arctic. In turn, the European countries' distance from cooperation with Russia and China would complicate the implementation of national tasks and negatively affect the development of the region as a zone of peaceful cooperation.

Assessing the involvement of China in the development of shipping, it should be noted that geographically, Chinese companies have declared their interest in cooperation along the entire length of the Russian Arctic from Arkhangelsk to Vladivostok. However, cooperation is mainly focused on the implementation of infrastructure projects in the Barents and White Seas (the gateway of the Russian Arctic to Europe), the Kara Sea (the backbone region for resource extraction in the Arctic), the Sea of Japan (the gateway of Arctic logistics to Asia). At the same time, many projects have been idle for years, indicating a strict dependence on government support. Meanwhile, China remains a promising source of investment in shipbuilding related to the Arctic (ice-class vessels, including those for transporting LNG, drilling platforms and port facilities adapted for the Arctic). In this area, the PRC is actively cooperating with leading Russian, American and European companies, rapidly reducing its own technological gap. On the condition of a parity partnership with Russian companies, Chinese corporations can make a positive contribution to the development of shipping along the Northern Sea Route.

Under these circumstances, the following areas are the most promising for Russian-Chinese cooperation. First, within the framework of the dialogue between the Legal Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Legal Department of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs — the study of mutually beneficial solutions to improve the legal support of shipping. Second, the strengthening of state support and mutual coordination in the framework of the development of port infrastructure projects in the Arctic and the Far East, as well as the construction of Arctic vessels for various purposes. This implies the development of a joint vision of priorities for cooperation in Arctic logistics in relation to the infrastructure of the border areas of the Far East and North-East of the PRC by the responsible agencies and local administrations. Third, strengthening mutual trust through joint exercises in maritime safety and environmental damage management, particularly in the Sea of Japan, as well as multilateral consultations with European and Asian partners to ensure the safety of Arctic shipping. Fourth, public and private

support for scientific projects and exchanges, as well as the development of multilateral dialogue with European and Asian partners in the field of scientific and technical cooperation for shipping in the Arctic.

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