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COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND NORWAY: STRENGTHENING DIALOGUE IN THE ARCTIC

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Abstract. This study analyzes the degree of influence of international tension due to anti-Russian sanctions on relations between Russia and Norway at the governmental and regional levels, including political, economic, environmental, cultural, and other spheres. The authors begin by discussing how Norway's accession to anti-Russian sanctions and active involvement in NATO have affected bilateral relations, especially in the economic and political spheres. The presented work is based on the principles of historicism and objectivity. The methodological framework for writing the article is the model of neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism. The source base of the study, in addition to publications in periodicals, consists of official documents regulating the foreign policy activities of Russia and Norway. The article attempts to structure the relations of the two Arctic neighbouring countries under new international conditions by highlighting two levels of interaction – governmental and regional – as well as critical elements, including issues of economic cooperation, mutual sanctions, cooperation in the field of environmental protection and fisheries, cooperation between the two countries in Spitsbergen, cooperation in science, culture, and education; and regional cooperation between Russia and Norway in the North and the Arctic. The article discusses to what extent security issues affect the development of the Russian-Norwegian dialogue in using the NSR as a transport route and problematic issues around Spitsbergen. Finally, the authors consider what practical measures are being taken by Russia and Norway to mitigate the general international tension in the bilateral dialogue using public diplomacy in the framework of strengthening and expanding contacts through the Barents Cooperation and interaction at the level of municipalities as well as universities in Russia and Norway. The authors conclude that notwithstanding geopolitical tensions, regional cooperation due to common borders, cultural and historical heritage, and the geo-economic relationship could be the primary drivers for the revival of ties between the two countries. *Authors' contribution.* Jawahar Vishnu Bhagwat developed the concept of the study and worked out its theoretical and methodological foundations. I.V. Rogachev analyzed the policies of Russia and Norway in various areas of bilateral cooperation and formulated the final conclusions.

Key words: Russia, Norway, Arctic, cross-border cooperation, Barents Euro-Arctic region, Northern Sea Route.

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СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО РОССИИ И НОРВЕГИИ: К УКРЕПЛЕНИЮ ДИАЛОГА В АРКТИКЕ

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Аннотация. В данном исследовании анализируется степень влияния международной напряженности из-за введения антироссийских санкций на отношения России и Норвегии на правительственном и региональном уровнях, включая политическую, экономическую, экологическую, культурную и иные сферы. Авторы начинают с обсуждения того, как присоединение Норвегии к антироссийским санкциям повлияло на двусторонние отношения, особенно в экономической и политической сфере. Представленная работа основывается на принципах историзма и объективности, методологической основой послужила модель неолиберального институционализма и конструктивизма. Источниковая база представленного исследования, помимо публикаций в периодических изданиях, состоит из официальных документов, регламентировавших внешнеполитическую деятельность России и Норвегии. В статье предпринята попытка структурировать отношения двух арктических стран – соседей в новых международных условиях путем выделения двух уровней взаимодействия – правительственного и регионального, а также ключевых элементов, включая вопросы экономического взаимодействия, взаимных санкций; совместная деятельность в области охраны окружающей среды и рыболовства; взаимодействие двух стран на Шпицбергене; сотрудничество в области науки, культуры и образования; региональное партнерство России и Норвегии на Севере и в Арктике. В статье изучается, в какой степени проблемы безопасности влияют на развитие российско-норвежского диалога в сфере использования СМП в качестве транспортного пути, и решения проблемных вопросов вокруг Шпицбергена. Наконец, авторы рассматривают, какие практические меры принимаются со стороны России и Норвегии для амортизации общей международной напряженности в двустороннем диалоге с использованием публичной дипломатии в рамках укрепления и расширения контактов по линии Баренцева сотрудничества, взаимодействия на уровне муниципалитетов, а также университетов России и Норвегии. Вывод статьи заключается в том, что, несмотря на геополитическую напряженность, региональное сотрудничество из-за общих границ, культурно-исторического наследия и геоэкономических отношений может стать основной движущей силой для сохранения и последующего развития связей между двумя странами.

Ключевые слова: Россия, Норвегия, Арктика, приграничное сотрудничество, Баренцев Евро-Арктический регион, Северный морской путь.

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Introduction. Relations between Russia and Norway have an extended and substantial history. During this period, both actors have demonstrated the ability to adapt to the changing international environment. The main thing for the two Nordic countries, which are different in scale and capabilities, has always been the historical experience of good neighbourliness, which allows for avoiding acute complexities in bilateral relations. At the present stage of the development of international relations, a renewed Russia seeks to follow the tradition of respect for the interests of its Northern and Arctic neighbour. This was confirmed by the signing of the agreement between Russia and Norway in Murmansk on September 15, 2010. The conclusion and its rapid ratification were a landmark in developing bilateral relations between Russia and Norway and a model of international dialogue in the Arctic.

This aims to study the impact of international tensions caused by the introduction of anti-Russian sanctions on relations between Russia and Norway at the governmental and regional levels. Within the framework of the study, the authors analyze the general nature of the relations between the two countries, identify the place and role of cross-border cooperation in the development and maintenance of relations. It also considers the possibilities of rapprochement within the framework of the development of Spitsbergen, the Northern Sea Route, and differences due to NATO expansion in the Arctic.

Methods and materials. Modern Russian-Norwegian relations are always the focus of attention of researchers, who emphasize their progressive development and mutual interest in strengthening the dialogue [3; 4]. To date, certain bilateral issues have been fully studied: the

settlement of disputed territories in the Arctic region, where the emphasis is on the acquisition of long-term benefits by both sides [6; 15]; military-political cooperation in the Arctic, where there are no serious divergences in Russian-Norwegian interests [8; 21]. However, during the Ukrainian crisis, the problem of NATO's increased activity in Norway emerged, which complicated the dialogue between the countries in ensuring security in the region [5; 39; 41].

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was the theory of neoliberal institutionalism and constructivism, which determines that despite tense international relations, there is a need for Russia and Norway to converge for mutual benefit and a peace agreement in order to strengthen security in the Arctic space and maintain regional ties. Consequently, the authors used a systematic approach to identify the drivers of the development of relations between the two countries. This made it possible to identify the relationship and influence of economic, military-strategic, cultural, and regional ties during the Russian-Norwegian dialogue in the North; and the Arctic. The basis of the research consists of official documents regulating the foreign policy activities of Russia and Norway in addition to publications in periodicals.

Analysis. The accession of Norway to anti-Russian sanctions on August 15, 2014, reduced the intensity of political dialogue at the highest level, the political leadership of the two countries. This, in particular, is confirmed by the Intergovernmental Commission (IPC) meeting on Cooperation between Russia and Norway, held in April 2017, after a long pause since June 2013. It should be emphasized that during the suspension of the dialogue through the IPC, the contacts of the parties continued at the interdepartmental level, including the Russian-Norwegian Commission for

Cooperation in the Field of Environmental Protection and the Mixed Russian-Norwegian Commission on Fisheries, which continued their work in a hybrid format [1].

Russia's retaliatory measures (counter-sanctions) against Norway, including, inter alia, a ban on fish exports, also negatively affected bilateral trade. As stated by Norwegian Prime Minister E. Sulberg, Russian countermeasures constrained her country to look for new markets in Asia, such as China and Japan. However, this has not compensated for Norway's economic losses [22].

From 2016 to 2021, there was an uneven but positive dynamics of trade turnover growth [2; 10]. In addition, discontent has grown among Norwegian political parties about joining the anti-Russian sanctions. This has been caused by economic impairment on both sides [24]. The leading economic indicators of trade and economic relations between the two countries are presented in Table.

The "black swan" in relations between the two countries was the imperative of Russia's special military operation (SMO) to effect the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. As a result of the decision of the EU Council, Norway, being a member, supported the new anti-Russian sanctions and called on the Russian leadership to stop the implementation of the special operation. In order to support the Ukrainian side, the Norwegian government sent its several thousand M72 anti-tank grenade launchers [17]. In response to these actions, the Kremlin added Norway to the list of unfriendly countries [16]. As a result, relations between the two countries at the federal level are in an uncertain position and depend on the nature and extent of the continuation of Russia's special operation in Ukraine.

The Council of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAC) is an essential tool in maintaining

Total value volume of trade turnover between Russia and Norway

<i>Year</i>	<i>bln \$</i>
2014	2,0
2015	1,3
2016	1,4
2017	1,79
2018	2,37
2019	3,34
2020	1,54
2021	2,7

Note. Source: [14].

regional ties in the North and Arctic, which has quite convincingly confirmed its stability and effectiveness.

The grant program of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat (NBS) remains one of the main stable mechanisms of cooperation between the border territories of Norway and Russia. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, although it showed a weak negative trend, the total amount of funding for joint projects under this scheme generally maintained a relatively high level of activity. On average, the NBS grant programs for 2014–2018 amounted to about \$2.7 million per year. Over four years since 2014, the NBS had financed joint projects in excess of \$12 million, or about 10% less than in the previous four years (\$13.3 million). Accordingly, the number of implemented projects supported by the NBS decreased slightly, by about 15–16% per year: 658 supported projects compared to 784 in the previous four years [38]. These changes are generally insignificant since the level of financing and the number of projects implemented with the support of the NBS until 2019 showed a steady positive trend. From 2019 to 2022, the number of projects and the amount of funding began to decline sharply. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian crisis caused this. However, despite this, the work of the NBS was not suspended.

The implementation of the Norwegian-Russian cooperation program in the field of healthcare continued. At the same time, the volume of financing of joint projects in this area before the COVID-19 pandemic increased slightly compared to previous years, despite the fact that the average number of projects implemented per year decreased [38].

Until February 2022, cooperation between the two countries in the field of culture was at a high level. After the SMO started, work in this area moved to a hybrid format. A qualitatively substantial phenomenon in this sector is the increasingly clearly observed creation of virtual cross-border creative communities that unite cultural managers and artists [11; 12]. These communities today determine the trend for the future development of ties in the North of Europe [35]. Thus, culture remains one of the main areas of interaction in the border environment, hardly susceptible to negative political ramifications.

In order to strengthen bilateral cooperation in 2018, an action plan was signed to intensify Russian-Norwegian interregional and cross-border cooperation for 2018–2022 [13]. The plan provides for implementing more than 20 joint projects and activities in areas such as transport and logistics, the arrangement of the state border, and the effective functioning of checkpoints [23].

Both the Norwegian and Russian sides are interested in cross-border cooperation. The initiative of the Murmansk regional authorities deserves particular mention. The authorities of the Arkhangelsk region were also trying to keep abreast of them [9; 19].

It should be noted that Russia's special military operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine undoubtedly affected regional-level ties. For example, Norway suspended participation in the BEAC on March 9, 2022 [20]. Consequently, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expected a speedy resumption of dialogue between the two countries [18]. Residents of the border areas of Norway feel similar hope. Thus, in Kirkenes in October 2022, the mayor of the city, local representatives of the country's major political parties, trade unionists, business people, and ordinary citizens made a call to avoid isolationist politics with Russia. The main argument in their speeches was the need to preserve the welfare of Norwegians cooperating with the Russian side in various fields [26].

The authors believe that geo-economic and cultural factors – economic necessity, historical ties, long-term educational, scientific, and cultural contacts with the existing effective cross-border experience of the Barents region could have a decisive impact on maintaining the partnership.

Another likely point of contact that allows us to hope for the preservation and development of bilateral ties is the Spitsbergen archipelago. This territory has always played a significant role in Norwegian-Russian relations.

The Norwegian side strives to extend its influence on the water areas around the archipelago. An example of this was the introduction by Norway on June 3, 1977, of a 200-mile fish protection zone around the Spitsbergen archipelago [15]. However, since such a decision contradicts Article 2 of the 1920 Treaty, the USSR and its successor, the Russian Federation, did not recognize the Norwegian 200-mile fish protection zone [7].

The archipelago reveals the presence of different countries' common interests within the ambit of scientific projects. Norway continues its policy of strengthening its presence, utilising the northernmost Norwegian town, Longyearbyen. The country leverages it as an essential element of geopolitical influence in the region, taking into account the interests of other states [27].

As part of the fifth package of anti-Russian sanctions, Norway closed its ports to Russian ships on May 7, 2022. However, these restrictions did not affect fishing vessels on the Spitsbergen archipelago, which indicates that there is a serious interest in continuing cooperation in areas particularly beneficial to the Norwegian government, especially in the archipelago area [25].

In general, as of October 2022, the interest of Norway and Russia in the rapprochement of positions in the Arctic, including Spitsbergen, remains. The International Treaty "On the Delimitation of Maritime Spaces and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean" of September 15, 2010, allows the two countries to coordinate efforts more actively in defending mutual interests in the field of preserving the marine environment and judicious extraction of transboundary stocks of its resources. In this regard, Oslo has more disagreements with Iceland, Great Britain, Spain, Latvia, and, in general, the European Union than with Russia. Therefore, Russian-Norwegian cooperation in this direction has a fundamental basis that might ensure the rapprochement of the two Nordic countries and give additional stability to international relations in the Arctic, including in Spitsbergen.

The likely reason for the two countries' rapprochement may be the use of the Northern Sea Route (NSR). According to scientific forecasts, regardless of the amount of CO₂ emissions, the Arctic will progressively be freed from ice cover. Arctic tourism is becoming increasingly popular, and the NSR will inevitably attract foreign partners and investors. Norwegian researchers are actively studying the NSR; they have contributed extensively to the study of the future development of the route [30]. However, the official discourse notes that the NSR is not interesting to Norway [33]. This is probably due to Norway's perspective outlined in its Arctic strategy, which states that an increase in freight traffic along the NSR is unlikely in the near future

while considering political, legal, economic, and environmental aspects [37].

It should be noted that Russia's efforts to regulate the NSR are not substantially different from Canada's position on the Northwest Passage [28; 34]. Experts from Norway disagree on the use of the NSR. Thorbjorn Johansson believes that after the crisis in the Suez Canal, the NSR will not be effective for political reasons and due to the lack of search and rescue facilities [32]. However, this point of view is not supported by another Norwegian expert, Jan-Gunnar Winter, who stressed the need for Norway to be more actively involved in the operation of the NSR. Thus, in the future, Norway may have increased congruence with Russia on the basis of the use of the NSR.

The point of divergence in relations between the two countries is the expansion of NATO's influence in the Arctic. After 2014, Norway actively participated in joint military exercises with NATO [29]. For its part, Russia continues to work on the restoration of Soviet military bases [41]. Such activity by NATO and Russia could threaten peace in the Arctic and lead to a military conflict. On the other hand, Russia and Norway have a thousand-year history of peace and good neighbourliness [40]. Western think tanks recognize that Russia's military build-up is mainly defensive in nature, which is also confirmed by the US Army's Arctic strategy, published in 2021. This fact should be taken into account by Norway [39].

The lack of contact between the militaries is also an alarming trend, as it may lead to conflicts [31; 36]. Therefore, the authors believe that countries need to use all possible opportunities to establish a political and military dialogue, at least on a bilateral basis.

Results. It can be unequivocally stated that relations between Russia and Norway at the governmental level have dragged down since 2014, while traditional dialogue has continued at the regional level. However, after 2016, cooperation was restored at the government level, and a number of factors contributed to this: disagreements among the political parties of Norway, reasonably pointing to economic penalties incurred by the country due to anti-Russian sanctions; stable and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries within the

framework of Barents Cooperation in the scientific, educational, cultural and environmental spheres; development and expansion of cross-border ties between Russian and Norwegian Arctic regions in the field of economy, health, tourism, education and culture; common interest in the development of hydrocarbons in the Arctic, despite the EU's desire to brake this process. However, Russia's conduct of the SMO again sharply slowed down the interaction between the two countries. Nevertheless, there are still platforms for maintaining the reduced level of dialogue.

The Far North and the Arctic are the main geopolitical vectors of Norway's development, where the Russian factor is significant. By contributing to NATO's security, Norway is unlikely to be able to afford to neglect or sacrifice the experience of Barents cooperation achieved in relations with Russia over an extensive period. This implementation of its Arctic policy confirmed this. Although the points of divergence cannot be ignored, there are significant points of convergence even in conditions of deep crisis. Regional cooperation has shown that the population on both sides is interested in peace and cooperation. Politicians should activate this shared heritage and perspective at the governmental level. In the current circumstances, it appears that it is only the cross-border cooperation of the two countries – scientific, educational, and socio-cultural contacts – that could help preserve the dialogue. As of 2022, the cross-border cooperation mechanisms still serve as a corridor for maintaining ties that allow us to hope for the return of the pre-crisis level of trust and cooperation. The upcoming thirtieth anniversary of the Barents region in 2023 may act as a catalyst.

There is a need to establish communication between the military in order to avoid conflict. Undoubtedly, the authors believe there are opportunities for expanding political and military cooperation, but this is unlikely in the near future, at least until the resolution of the Ukrainian crisis.

Based on the above, we can conclude that cooperation between the two countries will be curtailed in the short term. However, regional authorities, universities, socio-cultural organizations, and movements need to try to extend cross-border cooperation since Norway and Russia cannot but strive for good neighbourliness

in the interests of the peoples of the region. Geoeconomic and cultural relations between the two countries continue to be vital for geopolitical stability in the Arctic region. The near future will show whether Norway will abandon effective and mutually beneficial cooperation with the Russian Federation, including at the regional level.

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