

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Nataliya Markushina

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE NORTH-WEST FEDERAL DISTRICT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE NEW NORTH CONCEPT

This article analyses the role of Russia – the North-West federal district – in the New North concept, which encompasses new political relations in the North of Europe in the framework of international organisations and regional cooperation – for instance, the Northern Dimension.

Key words: regional external relations, New North concept, international organisations, Northern Dimension, soft security.



The change in world order after the collapse of the Soviet Union set its successor state — the Russian Federation — the task of exploring new forms of international cooperation. Participation in the projects and programmes of international organisation and the extension of regional connections made Russian foreign policy more flexible. The attempts to identify its place in the world brought Russian to the understanding of the need to involve the constituent entities (regions) into the improvement of country's international standing. A new political formula emerged — the search for new external interests at the regional level strengthen the state's standing in general. First of all, naturally, it concerned the issues of security and economic and sociohumanitarian interdependence.

As the Federation Treaty of 1992 and the new Constitution of 1993 were adopted, the legal capacity of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in the field of international connections expanded de jure significantly. The status of regions as administrative-territorial formations transformed into that of state formations — constituent entities of the Russian Federation, which, from the legal point of view, are independent participants of international and foreign economic relations [10]. One cannot say that it was an easy process for the countries herself or that it was fully understood in the West. Considerable influence was exerted on the regional strategy by the policies followed by state leaders and ranging from total freedom at the local level to the strengthening of "vertical of power" (which was immediately connected to the changes in the policies of state leaders).

The problem of shaping a policy towards the international relations of regions was not insignificant for Russia. It was especially evident in the

context of increased interest to regional development in the world in general and Europe in particular. According to the West, the actuality of regional factors makes state take efforts aimed at the formation of a legal (national and international) framework for its functioning [12]. Russian actions in this direction could not but lead to increasing trust of international partners. Moreover, one cannot but mention the favourable attitude of the largest neighbours of the Russian Federation — namely, the EU — to the regional policy. Of special interest for the united Europe were the north-western regions of the Russian Federation, which, in terms of geopolitics, are covered by the concept of "Northern Europe". Such situation was favourable for Russian regions, especially in view of the fact that the European North is in focus of attention of the leading powers. It can be explained by several reasons.

1. The geographical position of the Northern regions makes it into a transit point between Europe and Russia (and possibly Asia in the future).

2. Even after the collapse of the USSR, the Nordic countries lie "in the vicinity of great powers and virtually control the sea and air communications between them" [4, p. 29].

3. For major players in the international arena, strategic issues also include the northern topic, in particular, the Arctic problem.

Alongside their interest in the North (and, consequently, Russia), Nordic countries understood immediately the prospects of cooperation with constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Regional cooperation with Finland has been especially successful. According to the intergovernmental agreement of 1992, Finland's immediate partners are Saint Petersburg, the Leningrad and Murmansk regions, and the Republic of Karelia. The agreement covered a various areas of interaction: economic and technical cooperation, culture, science and academic contacts, sports and youth contacts, sister city relations and joint technical assistant projects [3]. In 1995, the Leningrad region signed direct agreements on cooperation with three Finnish provinces. A document on Finland's cooperation with the neighbouring regions of north-eastern Russian and the Baltics adopted by the Finnish government in 1996 was another step towards Russian-Finnish cross-border cooperation [17]. As to Norway and Sweden, Russian north-western regions cooperate with the northern territories.

Projects implemented on the territory of Russian regions with the support of European financial institutions and national budes of Nordic countries are aimed at the increase in efficiency of energy resource management, environmental protection, strengthening of democratic institutions, and improving nuclear safety, i.e. solve security problems. Various issues are being addressed — from the marketing of fishing vessels and development of air services to cooperation in the field of nuclear security of Russia¹. The administrations of constituent entities in north-western Russia take into account the strategic plans of their international partners formulated in the programmes of Nordic regional organisations, as well as national programmes of Finland, Sweden, and Norway aimed at

¹ The information was provided by the Saint Petersburg office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



cooperation with the neighbouring territories of Russia. Taking them into account, regions take an immediate part in solving the problems of security of their state. The unique two-tier (international regions and regions) mechanism of cooperation on security issues in the region — the New North concept — facilitates efficient solution to many problems, which can hardly be tackled at the governmental level. The idea of the New North was put forward by the president of Iceland Ólafur Grímsson as a strategy for Nordic countries within world politics, including the major issues of northern politics, at the 6th General Assembly of Northern Forum in 2003 [14]. This cooperation, in the framework of a network of northern regional organisations (the Nordic council, the Arctic council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of Baltic Sea States, etc), the Northern Dimension, as well as regional cooperation with the participation of Russian north-western federal district (NWFD).

As to the role of Russia within the New North concept, the key criteria are as follows:

Firstly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia became increasingly identified as a northern power. In terms of geopolitics, it is linked to the country's interests in the Arctic and cooperation in the North of Europe. It is important to mention that, in a wider sense, two-thirds of the Russian Federation belongs to the geographical North. Accommodating 8% of the country's population, the region accounts for 28% of industrial production and 60% of export. Russian North is rich in resources, it is home to from 70 to 90% of oil, gas, apatite, bauxite, nickel, lead, gold, and diamond reserves, as well as timber [5]. Thus, if we consider the North of Europe in the context of world integration, the resolution of security issues relates, first of all, to good-neighbourly relations of Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland with Russia.

Secondly, special focus is given to the foreign policy potential of the north-western federal district, which brings together 11 constituent entities of the Russian Federation. The specific geopolitical position and the leading place among Russian region make it possible for the NWFD to establish active connection with the neighbours. An important factor was the extension of the Nee Northern Europe geopolitical concept, traditionally applied to Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland [6], to Russian North-West by western [29] and Russian scholars.

Thirdly, it is the North that serves as a site for the formation of regional economic, political and cultural centre. According to the definition given by Prof. I. V. Zeleneva from Saint Petersburg, "the development of identity concepts becomes for these regional centres a pivotal issue, the resolution of which is impossible without taking into account the factors of intraregional and international political processes at the regional and interregional levels" [9, p. 91]. The idea of the New North undoubtedly falls into this category. Another important factor is that, the significance of "soft" security is increasing in the framework of northern cooperation. It includes environmental, economics, human, social, cultural, linguistic and many other types of security, which are oriented not only towards the state but also towards an individual human being. It is important to emphasise that the development of "soft" security ideas went beyond the limits of research

projects and extended to the field of politics, becoming an important condition for decision making. So, as early as 1996, the Danish minister for foreign affairs, Niels Helveg Petersen, outlined his vision of the content of "soft" security. According to him, it embraces all aspects of security, including military operations — everything from internal stability to the implementation of the Petersberg tasks [26, p. 23]. In 1997, the Norwegian prime minister, Bjørn Tore Godal, linked the terms "soft" and "civil" security [26, p. 23], claiming that, for the Councils of Baltic Sea States, soft security is closely connected to "civil security", which covers different forms of cooperation, between the police, border services, law enforcement agencies, etc [26, p. 23].

Fourthly, we should not, of course, forget about the European Union and its understanding of the need for regional cooperation. New opportunities for north-western constituent entities arose as the Agreement on partnership and cooperation between the EU and Russia, an article of which stipulates that the parties should facilitate the development of ties between the corresponding region, was signed in 1994 [13]. In essence, European regional integration is European scale globalisation, which outpaced world globalisation and shaped one of the strongest players in the world arena. Cooperation with the EU is very promising for today's Russia, since the country attaches significance to two processes relating to the structuring of the world social space and, at first sight, excluding each other — globalisation and regionalisation [11]. According to the estimates of European leaders, EU instruments are sufficient to influence world politics [23]. Resting on its potential and increasing role in the world arena, the European Union is formulating a new policy. In the framework of this policy, an important component of relations with the countries of Northern Europe is direct contacts with Russian regions. The ideas of regional cooperation put forward by the European Union are supported not only by the member states but also by the immediate neighbours. Thus, one can speak of the impact of European regional policy on the content of the regional policy of Nordic countries. The disagreements between the united Europe and the Russian Federation often make regional-level cooperation the only alternative to insoluble state-level problems.

It all means that the North has strategic importance for the Russian Federation and its regions. Within the modern northern policy, a curious element is the policy of the Baltic States, which have been considered by the traditional Northern European countries as a part of their region after the collapse of the USSR. However, after regaining independence, the Baltics chose integration into western structures — namely the NATO and EU — as a strategic objective [29]. It became evident that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are reluctant to identify themselves with the Nordic development trajectory. Of course, it gave an additional advantage to the north-western federal district.

However, a new stage of regional cooperation in the North should be linked not only to the emergence of the New North concept, but also to that it can bring tangible projects to Russia-EU cooperation. It also relates to the idea of the northern dimension.



The principal objective of European regional policy, according to Article 120 of the Treaty on the European Union [20], is the enhancement of economic and social integration, which can ignore the interests of Russian north-western regions. It is impossible to imagine Russia's international relations without European participation, at the same time, is the development of international activity of the European oriented, to a great extent, to Russia and its regions. However, one should admit within contacts with the EU, Russian regions often have to abide by the European rules of economic relations.

On May 10, 2005, four "road maps" were signed. The initial optimism was soon replaced by disappointment. As the head of international committee, K. Kosachev, mentioned, "in October of the same year, at the Russia-EU summit in London, a significant progress in the implementation of road maps was mentioned, however, few solutions represent the interest of Russians [2]. According to the prime minister of Luxembourg, Jean-Claude Juncker, today's problems relating to the development of the four "roads maps" are mostly psychological [19]. The situation was also aggravated by western media and analysts, who are still asking the question as to how the world in general and EU in particular should develop relations with increasingly aggressive Russia [27]. Nevertheless, despite these ideas, the EU and Russia cannot fully implement the plans relating to the "road maps". According to Russian experts, "neither the Russia-EU summit held in May 2006, nor the preceding numerous consultations at different levels yielded any practical results. Some of them were almost useless. Neither Russia, nor the EU put forward any new ideas or detailed propositions regarding giving certain content to the four spaces" [21]. Both parties refer to the need to create, at first, a wide network of institutions, which could function within the four spaces through efficient management of programmes and projects. The position of the Russian side was quite optimistic: "It seems that the formation of an interdependence management system should precede cooperation intensification. Therefore, the situation has been developing in the right direction so far. Joint expert and administrative structures are being accumulated. Strong structured groups are being created in different fields within the four spaces" [21].

It was evident that Russian state and the large international cooperation had to follow a well-trodden path of international cooperation, which would facilitate the development of international contacts. Such invaluable experience was the results of cooperation within the New North concept — the cooperation with northern regional organisations (within the Arctic, Baltic and Barents dimensions), in the field of "soft" security, and of course, within the Northern Dimension. It is not a coincidence that the road map for the common economic space adopted at the Russia EU summit (Moscow, May 10, 2005) stipulated that the initiatives undertaken within the CES would take into account the priorities identified by both parties at the level of regional organisations and projects, such as the CBSS and the Northern Dimension [8].

As to the Northern Dimension projects, it was initially designed for the north-western regions of the Russian Federation. Geographically, the

Northern Dimension covered a territory from Iceland eastwards, including north-western Russia, from Norway, the Barents and Kara Sea in the north to the Baltic Sea coast in the south. The non-EU-member countries of the Northern Dimension are the Russian Federation, Norway, and Iceland [1, p. 163]. One should not forget that the project was developed on the initiative of Finland — a country with a 1300 km common border with Russia, which also became the Russia-EU border in 1995. The difference in approaches to the cooperation between the country and international organisation could not but lead to chaos in regional project activity. According to Russian experts, the reason was that the Northern Dimension concept, first of all, represented the EU's aspiration to gain access to Russian raw material resources (gas, oil, cheap power, timber, etc) [18]. According to Prof. A. A. Sergunin, Russian regions were expected to play the role of "junior partner" [18]. This situation resulted in Russia reject the second plan, since the actions of EU contradicted the country's interests [16]. The situation changed, when, instead of the third plan, a decision was made to transform the concept into an equal partnership between Russia, the EU, Norway, and Iceland.

According to the framework document adopted on November 24, 2006, in particular § 3, clause 14, the Northern Dimension becomes a regional manifestation of the Russia-EU common spaces. The Russian Federation and the European Union will consider the Northern Dimension policy as a cross-cutting theme of cooperation and, where it makes sense, use political mechanisms for the implementation of "road maps" within the Common Spaces, given the full participation of Norway and Iceland in solving the problems pertaining to the Northern Dimension policy [16].

The Northern Dimension is an element of a wider framework of partner relations between Russian and the EU, which also embrace the northern political vector. At the same time, emphasis is put on the harmonisation of practical proposals regarding priority projects and strict control over their implementation. These priorities are economy, trade, and investment, business cooperation, energy, transport, communications, science, education, social welfare and healthcare, environmental protection and nuclear safety, and personal contacts. However, they are covered by the four common spaces of Russia-EU relations [22]. Thus, the northern Dimension becomes an instrument of the four common spaces. This policy has been successful in all these fields; economic, environmental and many other projects have been implemented in the framework of Northern Dimension over the years. The Northern Dimension mechanisms can be employed in the implementation of the four "road maps".

The "new" Northern Dimension strategy follows the "old one" placing emphasis on the development of north-western Russia. It is the Northern Dimension geographical region that is going to become the testing site for the ideas and projects within the four common spaces. Priority is still given to the Northern Dimension programmes — the Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership and the Northern Dimension Partnership in Health and Social Well-Being. The issues of transport and energy, which are being solved with varied success, constitute a special section of the project. Equal partnership as a new stage of the northern Dimension policy gives

priority to the Kaliningrad region and the Arctic, as well as the Baltic and Barents Seas. Therefore, the two major topics discussed at the conference were the implementation of the Northern dimension policy towards the Arctic and Baltic Sea regions.

The Arctic plays a special part within the Northern Dimension. It pertains, naturally, to cooperation with the Arctic countries (Iceland, the Kingdom of Denmark (with Greenland), the Kingdom of Norway, the Kingdom of Sweden, Canada, the Russian Federation, and the United States of America). Since Sweden and Denmark are EU member-states and Norway and Iceland are connected with them by partner relations, the formulation of EU Arctic policy largely depends on the development of external policy of the countries of Northern Europe and further Arctic initiatives within the Northern Dimension. From this point of view, the significance of this project is increasing for the Russian Federation, because, since 1986, different concepts and models of the Arctic development have hardly ever given Russia/the USSR the leading role.

In November 1999, at the ministerial meeting dedicated to the Northern Dimension issues, Denmark introduced the Arctic Window initiative, thus becoming a participant of the EU through the Northern Dimension [24]. This initiative coincided with Danish presidency of the EU. The proposition was made by Prime Minister J. Motzfeldt on behalf of the government of Greenland. It was symbolic, since, as Greenland left the European Economic Area in 1985, the geographical connections between the EU and the Arctic became limited. Introducing a new initiative on the Arctic on behalf of Greenland, Denmark exposed the EU to the Arctic issues once again [24]. In December 1999, in Helsinki, the European Union approved these initiatives; three main areas of cooperation in the Arctic were identified:

- 1) environmental protection;
- 2) sustainable development;
- 3) Arctic studies [25].

So, the Arctic Window of the Northern Dimension became another resource for the development of an open network between the European Union and Arctic cooperation and another element of the New North policy.

Thus, Russian foreign policy and the country's role in the New North concept, including regional cooperation in the framework of international organisations, should be supported and developed. As early as the 1990s, the legislation of the Russian Federation made it possible for constituent entities, including the north-western federal district, to participate independently in international and foreign economic relations. In its turn, the development of the New North concept and policy towards Russia will depend on the advancing of mutual interests of regional international organisations functioning within the geopolitical space of the New North, the Russian Federation (as well as the EU) and the participation of the NWFD regions in developing and implementing the Northern Dimension plans, and the efficiency of Russian administrative, legislative, and economic institutes meeting the criteria of regional cooperation.

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About author

Dr Nataliya Yu. Markushina, Associate Professor, Department of World Politics, post doctoral student, Faculty of International Relations, Saint Petersburg State University.

E-mail: nat_markushina@yandex.ru