

The Northern Sea Route of the Maritime Silk Road

by Dean Andromidas and Tony Papert

Jan. 25—The world’s largest-ever conference on the Arctic, with 3,000-3,500 participants from all over the globe, is now underway in Tromsø, Norway, more than 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle. Tromsø is famous as the jumping-off point for great Arctic exploration missions, and the center for Arctic hunting in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.

The focus of interest of the Jan. 21-26 Arctic Frontiers 2018 Conference going on now, is the Northern Sea Route, or the Arctic Route, as an alternative sea route between Europe and Asia. The ongoing melting of the Arctic ice—a phenomenon of the far North not to be confused with non-existent global warming—makes this sea route practicable already today. As *EIR* has reported, Russia is building a series of the world’s largest icebreakers in order to expand the use of this route. On June 20, 2017, China officially included the Arctic Route as part of the [Maritime Silk Road](#) in its “Vision for Maritime Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative.”

In an interview with TASS at the conference, Japan’s Ambassador

for International Economic Affairs, Ambassador for the Japan Year in Russia, and Ambassador in Charge of Arctic Affairs, Keiji Ide, said that Japan was enormously interested in the development of the Northern Sea Route, gas projects in Yamal, and long-term cooperation with Russia.

“Unconditionally, there is enormous interest in the Northern Sea Route. Business people from Hokkaido



Arctic Frontiers 2018/Terje Mortensen

Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soreide and five other Norwegian government ministers appeared at the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø.



Gazprom

A gas facility at the Bovanenkovskoye field in the Yamal gas fields.

were speaking about it at today’s conference,” said the ambassador, who speaks fluent Russian. “Of course, it is just a beginning. People assess risks and calculate what is profitable or not. They are considering them very carefully.”

Ide said there was great interest in the Yamal LNG project, which began last year (which also enjoys significant Chinese investment), as well as the idea of building infrastructure for liquefied natural gas (LNG) production in Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula, in gas fields only 1,730 km northeast of Japan. Ide continued:

We want to collaborate with our Russian friends pursuing a long-term goal. Regardless of a rift between our countries in politics, we cannot say we do not want to develop our relations. On the contrary, if we come across either difficulties or disagreements, those need to be overcome.

Thank God, your President [Vladimir] Putin and our Prime Minister [Shinzo] Abe enjoy warm, good relations, so we will be developing economic cooperation with Russia.

The independent Russian natural gas giant Novatek was repre-

sented in Tromsø by the Norwegian Bjorn Gundersen, Deputy Director of its LNG Projects Department. Novatek’s Yamal and associated Murmansk projects are the largest construction projects underway in Russia, and perhaps in the world. Novatek’s partner Total (of France) notes on its website:

At the start of the project, there were no access routes to the site by land or by sea. To facilitate the transportation of equipment and staff, construction began on a large-capacity regional

transportation hub in 2011, comprising the port of Sabetta and an international airport.

Shipping LNG in such extreme conditions also required Total and its partners to design a new breed of vessel: the LNG ice-breaker tanker. This innovative solution allows LNG to be transported all year long without the assistance of ice-breakers. Measuring 300 meters [in length] and boasting a capacity of 172,600 cubic meters, the ship can sail in ice of up to 2.1 meters thick. In all, 15 LNG ice-breakers will be gradually commissioned between now and 2019, the first of which is the *Christophe de Margerie*.

To unlock access to the vast gas resources of Russia’s Far North, the Yamal LNG project has



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The first ice-breaking LNG carrier launched in mid-January 2016 in South Korea.

inaugurated a new LNG shipping route. Known as the Northern Sea Route, it enables vessels to reach Asia in 15 days via the Bering Strait, compared with 30 days using the conventional route through the Suez Canal. The journey can be made between May and November, when the ice is thin enough to navigate. This feat is only possible thanks to a new breed of versatile LNG carriers, which feature ice-breaking technology.

The Yamal project's entire LNG production of eventually 34 million tons per year, will all be carried to customers both in Asia and in Europe via the Northern Sea Route.