

Dear Friends,

If Russia had a parliamentary tradition similar to that in the United Kingdom, a barrel with crude oil or a tank with methane would substitute for the famous Woolsack, the seat of the Lord Speaker. Today, Russia is one of the three world leaders in the production of hydrocarbons, and over 90% of Russian gas and about 10% of oil comes from the Arctic oil and gas provinces.

Taking into account the continental shelf, the Russian Arctic occupies over a third of the entire territory of Russia. This part of Russia is a true “land of contrasts,” with eternal ice, huge natural reserves, scarce population, and a rich history. As early as in the second half of the 18th century, the first Russian academician Mikhail Lomonosov wrote in one of his last works, which became a testament to the future Arctic explorer, about the need to search for and develop a northern sea route “to the eastern peoples.” Today this is a major transport line, known as the Northern Sea Route. The great Russian scholar believed that the Arctic Ocean was “...a spacious field where Russian glory can grow.”

In the past century, these prophetic words written by Lomonosov were translated into the effort associated with the industrial development of the Russian North, including the search for oil and gas in the continental part of the Arctic. In the early 1930s, Soviet geologists found the world’s first Arctic oil fields in the Komi Republic; in those years, no other country was searching for oil and gas in the Arctic. The discovery, exploration, and development of these fields in most adverse climatic conditions were the outcome of the heroic work of several generations based on the national science and technology.

So far, no country, except Russia, has experience in developing such unique giant gas fields as those discovered in the north of West Siberia since the 1960s. Although the most part of the extracted “wet gas,” which contains not only methane but also ethane, propane, and butane—most valuable raw materials for the petrochemical industry,—is simply burned, Academician Alexey Kontorovich, a leading oil scientist and an expert on energy security, believes that Russia has every opportunity to turn from an importer into the world’s largest exporter of petrochemical products.

At the beginning of the 1980s, prospecting works were launched in the Barents and Kara Seas; the proven reserves of the discovered large fields in this region exceed 10 trillion m³ gas and 0.5 billion tons oil. Most recently, the Rosneft company reported the discovery of another giant oil-and-gas field in the Kara Sea, symbolically named Pobeda (in Russian—‘Victory’). Although geologists have explored no more than one-tenth of these territories, they have compelling



evidence that the Russian Western Arctic shelf of the Arctic Ocean concentrates over 90% of the gas reserves and more than 45% of the oil reserves currently known to exist in all the shelves of the Earth’s circumpolar belt.

Therefore, it is particularly important to ensure accurate demarcation of the external borders of the Russian continental shelf. The research findings that will serve as grounds for an application to the United Nations indicate that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev underwater ridges in the Arctic Ocean are a continuation of the Siberian continental plate and are a natural bridge connecting the North American and Asian continents. The recognition of these borders could give Russia more than 1 million km² of the Arctic shelf and the right to develop the huge oil and gas deposits in Chukotka—the North Pole—Taimyr.

Another issue is equipment and technologies for the exploration and production of oil and gas in the harshest conditions of multiyear ice. Today, no one has these technologies, and they need to be developed. A convincing example of the capabilities of the Russian science and industry is the unique oil platform Prirazlomnaya, which was built by OAO PO Sevmash, one of the largest shipbuilding complexes in Russia. Prirazlomnaya is the world’s first platform designed to work on the Arctic shelf among drifting ice floes.

As Alexey Kontorovich rightly noted, “we all know well since the first expeditions to the Arctic that this land submits only to the strong, to those who have a goal and strive for it... During most of the twentieth century, Russia has been a pioneer in the development of the Arctic. And so it should be in the future!”

Academician Nikolay L. Dobretsov,
Editor-in-Chief

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dobretsov', written in a cursive style.