

UDC 332.1+339.9

DOI: 10.17238/issn2221-2698.2016.24.166

Arctic interests and policy of France



© **Yuri I. Rubinsky**, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Head of the Centre of French Studies, Institute of Europe of the RAS. Phone: 8 (495) 692-23-04. E-mail: yuri.rubinski@mail.ru

Abstract. The author considers scientific, economic and political activities of France for the development and exploration of the Arctic, providing security there. Along with some other non-Arctic countries, France is not ready to accept such a situation when eight members of the Arctic Council solve Arctic problems on behalf of all mankind.

Keywords: *France, Arctic, Russia, the Arctic Council, observer countries of the Arctic Council, France's interests in the Arctic, policy*

Although France is not an Arctic country, it claims the status of "polar" country in view of its interests in the region and a significant contribution to scientific research, as well as observer status in the Arctic Council.

Strategic interests of France in the Arctic

French strategic interests in the Arctic are very diverse, and they are similar to those of other major European countries:

1. the study of climate change and its consequences, especially for fishing;
2. the safety and cost of maritime transport;
3. business interests in the Arctic (especially of powerful company Total);
4. promotion of the EU in the Arctic Council and providing of the geopolitical interests in the Arctic for France and integration union as a whole [1].

The French Foreign Ministry issued a formal "road map" in March of 2016, which outlined the main areas of the policy of France in the Arctic. The main thesis is that in the context of global warming the Arctic becomes the object of very great importance for the entire international community. [2]

Since France does not have significant energy reserves, it imports hydrocarbons on a large scale (8th place in the world for import of gas and oil), mainly from Norway, Africa and the Middle East. One French oil and gas company belonging to a class of TNCs is Total. Norway takes 1st place in natural gas supply of France and 2nd — in oil supply (after Russia). In France, Norway is considered as advanced country in terms of technology, which, moreover, is rich in fuel. French companies Total and Gaz de France / Suez are the main buyers of the liquefied gas produced from natural gas extracted at the Norwegian field "Snohvit" in the Barents Sea.

The Company Total extracts hydrocarbons throughout the world. This company is very important for the economy, since it accounts for 12% of the French stock market. Its profit in 2012 reached \$ 12 billion, tax contributions to the state treasury amounted to 1.2 billion euros¹, which is quite enough to make the state attentive to the interests of the oil business. The company is considered to be oil and gas expert (including in a cold climate) and in appropriate technologies. The company carries out most of the Arctic operations in the Norwegian and Russian Arctic, and the company makes significant investments in the Russian sector of the Arctic. The company is present in the regions of the Far North since the 1970s. and has accumulated a large experience in hydrocarbon production in harsh environments. It participates in the geological works to study deposits in Alaska, in Northern Canada, at Spitsbergen, at the Snow White in the Barents Sea, at the west of Greenland, in the Timan-Pechora basin in Russia, in Western Siberia. This French TNC bought a stake of the deposit at Yamal, as well as in the company Novatek, 25% in Shtockman project, along with Gazprom, but the development of Shtockman is postponed until the 30-ies of XXI century. The company employs 97,000 people, 40% of them are engaged outside Europe. One of the senior executives of Total, Christopher de Margerie, who died tragically in a plane crash in 2013, warned against the start of oil production in the Arctic on the basis of existing technologies, rightly believing that the threat of major disasters is too high.

French experts are paying particular attention to the massive migration of marine biological resources from the Atlantic into the Arctic Ocean with the global warming, considering it as a basis for their claims to those resources.

France shows the increased interest in the Arctic research, protection of the natural environment of the Arctic, ensuring of military security of the region, the use of the Northern Sea Route and to the production of hydrocarbons in the Arctic. Its Arctic policy has been discussed in both chambers of parliament — the Senate and the National Assembly. Certain institutional framework for its implementation have been created. Michel Rocard, a former prime minister, was appointed Special Ambassador for Arctic issues in 2009. This politician was known as the "father" of the Madrid Protocol on the environmental protection of the Earth's south pole, which was signed in 1991 in connection with the conclusion of the Antarctic Treaty. These documents banned the mining on this continent for 50 years. It is obvious that the French ruling circles are not averse to use some of the approaches to Antarctic issues in relation to the Arctic policy.

France leads the Arctic research at the permanent station, founded in 1963 in the scientific town of Ny-Alesund, located at Svalbard. French naturalists conducted polar research since the

¹ Le Mond fr. 21.12. 2011.

second half of XIX century. The largest known among them were Charles Rabo (1856—1944) and Jean Corbeil (1920—1970), their names are immortalized in the names of two French research stations in Spitzbergen. The research icebreaker Astrolabe and research vessel Marion Dufresne are used there. The icebreaker passed between the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean along the Northwest Passage.

Currently, France is conducting about twenty different research programs in the Arctic. Paul Emile Victor French Polar Institute is actively cooperating in the field of Arctic research with the Alfred Wegener German Institute for Polar and Marine Research in AWIPEV program. Two institutes have a common scientific base at Spitzbergen. Cooperation is also arranged with the Norwegian University Centre in Svalbard in the capital of the archipelago Longiyarbyuene, as well as with the Russian scientific organizations. France actively participated in the International Polar Year 2007—2008. Four in total French research institutions are engaged in conducting of the polar research: The French Polar Institute, Arctic Research Centre, the European Arctic Centre and the French National Center of Scientific Research.

France has had a significant influence on the formation of the Arctic EU strategy, and that was France which has initiated the development of relevant products and documents. France was especially active in this area during last presidency in the EU in 2008. As a nuclear power, France is committed to participate in ensuring security in the Arctic. It is actively involved in military cooperation with Denmark, Canada, Norway, the United States in the conduct of military exercises “Cool response”, organized every second year by NATO member states at the territory of Norway [1; 3; 4].

France is involved in the activities of regional Arctic organizations is the observer in the Arctic Council and CBER. Besides scientific research, climate change and environmental protection, France is interested in the Arctic mineral resources, as it is assumed that the Arctic hydrocarbon reserves are enormous, and they are the only in the world which have not been yet exploited., In the French White Book on defense and security, published in 2013, energy security is considered as one of four priorities of France [4].

France has great interest in the northern sea routes, it is trying to legally justify giving the international status for the Canadian Northwest Passage, but it is not supported by the Government of Canada. The justification is explained by the fact that Canadian economic potential is too small to effectively manage this route, and Canada does not have sufficient financial resources needed for this.

France is also interested in sustainable fishing in the northern seas. The matter is that France is a large buyer of fish caught in the northern waters. It is also Europe's largest consumer of fish caught outside the EU fishing areas. The country takes the 1st place in Europe for the consumption of fish per capita. Almost half of the foreign French purchases of fish and seafood accounts for the northern seas: The Norwegian, Barents and Kara [1].

Thus, three factors have stipulated the increase of France's interest to the Arctic: climate change, increased competition for resources, the problem of the boundaries of the exclusive economic zones, though UNO deals with the issue of the territorial areas. All three factors are connected with the security. The Russian expedition to the North Pole and hoisting of the titanium Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean have been perceived ambiguously in France. Since that France began to take measures to ensure that its armed forces could carry out military operations in the Arctic zone. The French infantry battalion for the first time took part in the international military exercise "cool response", which is regularly held in Norway, with the participation of NATO. 9,000 soldiers from 14 NATO countries took part in exercise in 2012, including 420 French foot-soldiers. The exercises of 2012 were carried out not only in the territory of Norway but also in Sweden. Britain, Canada, Netherlands, USA, France and Sweden became the largest participants. Later France held exercises with Russia in the Barents Sea with the call of the French ship to Severodvinsk. The Russian cruiser "Peter the Great" made a friendly visit to the French Brest. At present, a contingent of French troops, who are able to conduct operations in the Arctic, has reached 6000. French warships and nuclear submarines regularly go to the northern sea. French Air Force took part in the international military exercise in Alaska. French pilots take part in the annual exercise in the North Kaloth, which is located in the north of Norway, Sweden and Finland [3].

The Arctic policy of France

One of the central components of French policy in the Arctic is the statement that this policy should have not regional but global nature, because the events in the Arctic directly affect also French interests. This is justified by the influence of the Arctic on climate. Hence the conclusion is made that you can not trust the so-called Arctic Club of five or eight states.

SPA Arctic Circle was organized in France in 2006, which supports the idea of establishing of the international control over the Arctic and polar nature. Stanislav Pottier from the IMF and Professor of the Institute for Policy Studies in the elite "Big School" (Grande École de Paris) Laurent Mayet are the heads of this organization. They became advisers of the representative of the President of France on the Arctic issues M. Rocard, who has been appointed later. The working

group of SPA Arctic Circle prepared a draft of the law on the protection of the Arctic nature in 2007. In October 2008, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Arctic governance. This document proposed to initiate negotiations in order to conclude an international treaty for the protection of the Arctic nature. 597 members of EP voted in favor of the resolution. The idea was to establish the order in the Arctic, similar to that which was established with the active support of France for the Antarctic.

Senator Christian Gaudin made the basis of the Arctic policy of France. He prepared two reports on French interests in the polar regions. The reports were presented to the Senate and to the National Assembly. One of the conclusions was that the role of the North for economic development increased. The senator made a number of proposals to the government and proved the necessity of the French presence at both poles. He recommended to appoint an official who would be responsible for the coordination of French policy in the Arctic. It is in line with these recommendations, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs appointed as "Ambassador of the Arctic" the former French Prime Minister M. Rocard in March 2009. Since 2010, Ambassador M. Rocard, together with the French State Secretary for European Affairs Pierre Lellouche participated in the meetings of the Arctic Council, organized a parliamentary group on Arctic affairs. Official title of the M. Rocard — "Ambassador at the international negotiations on the Arctic and Antarctic" [1].

Another idea of senator C. Godin was to create an international observatory in the Arctic, as well as to establish international regulation of human activity in mining and tourism. To implement this idea, Senator K. Godin recommends to use the support of the European Union, these ideas were promoted particularly active during the French presidency of the European Union. The fact is that France is seeking to strengthen its influence on the formation of EU policy and one of the areas in which France hopes to prove itself is the Arctic policy. France chosen four priorities during its presidency in the EU: immigration, reform of agricultural policy, climate and energy in one package, as well as European policy in the sphere of security and defense. The Arctic aspect was present in two of the four priorities (in priority 3 and 4).

Development of Arctic issues in the EU based on the fact that the Union already has a policy of the Northern Dimension, which applies to the Arctic. Thus, a new political concept — the "Arctic window" of the EU policy appeared.

During a visit to Greenland, actively supported by all the Scandinavian countries and Finland, the French Ambassador for Ecology Laurent Stefanini said: "The Arctic is part of the Northern Dimension of the EU common policy in the field of foreign and security policy, and you can be sure that we will develop this priority. The EU has the "Arctic window", and even more —

the "Arctic door"². EU Commission issued the first document on the Arctic Policy in November 2008 as the development of this view.

In France, broad public debates on environmental protection are conducted at the residence of the Prime Minister on Rue de Grenelle, with the participation of both political parties, and civil society representatives, in which the matters relating to the protection of the environment are discussed, the documents are accepted, summarizing these debates. After the Paris Summit for the Environment in 2015, the French Parliament adopted a resolution in which it was proposed to establish an international commission to manage the Arctic, because this region affects the climate of the entire planet, as well as to adapt the international maritime regulation [5] for the Arctic Ocean.

In order to expand the influence on the work of the Arctic Council, France is not satisfied with the observer status in the Arctic Council — France would like to increase the participation, becoming an associate member (now it has the observer status) to be able to participate in the preparation of documents, which is conducted in the framework of working groups. France criticizes the Arctic Council, believing that they can not rely on "the Arctic club" in solving of such large-scale problems that arise in the Arctic and that affect all of humanity. The French side is willing to participate in the defense of the Far North from the global challenges and in ensuring of its security. It is earnestly seeking a legal basis to play a more active role in the Arctic. Its representatives, in particular, M. Rocard, say that there are serious gaps in the Arctic management system, and participation of interested non-regional countries is required, and management of the Arctic can not be restricted only by those countries that surround the region³. M. Rocard criticizes the Arctic group of 8, because they failed to introduce a legally binding controls in the Arctic. He described Declaration adopted in Ilulissat in 2008, as a document that only stated the Arctic problems, but did not offer their solutions. He calls among these problems fishing, maritime security, ensuring the strategic interests of the world powers, resources exploitation. Polar Ambassador of France does not agree with the fact that only Arctic countries are responsible for the situation in the Arctic. Statements of M. Rocard confirmed that there are serious contradictions between the Arctic Council members and non-Arctic countries, at least, from the French point of view⁴.

² L. Heininen (editor), Arctic Yearbook 2012, Northern Research Forum and TN, p. 66—67.

³ Shields A. Visit de Fanden premier ministre francais -Arctique: la fin du 'chacun chez soi' est inévitable, croit Michel Rocard. Le Devoir, A3.

⁴ Rocard M. The Arctic and the European Union: Environmental and Human Challenges. Stockholm, Sweden. June 2011.

A number of French experts write that France, along with some other non-Arctic countries, is not ready to accept a situation when eight members of the AC decide the Arctic issues on behalf of all mankind. In their view, it would be a mistake to limit the role of outsiders (the UK, Germany, China, France and the EU) by the observer status, which does not give the right to vote at meetings of the Arctic Council [6]. Thus, France claims to have greater role in the Arctic affairs, than that it has now.

According to French experts, non-Arctic countries should participate in the preparation of documents, which are arranged within the framework of working groups of the Arctic Council on the issues of security, fishing and environmental protection. For example, a serious problem, which is waiting for its decision, is that there is no fishing management regime to the north of Spitsbergen and the Bering Strait. The decision is complicated by the fact that there are no reliable data about these sea areas which would create a scientific basis for the establishment of fishing quotas. This problem is difficult to solve in a narrow range. There are several international organizations that could help to solve it. In addition to the working group on keeping the Arctic flora and fauna of the Arctic Council, the French experts refer to the following bodies: Fishing Council for the North-East Atlantic; Marine scientific organization for the North Atlantic Ocean; The International scientific Arctic Committee; International Council for Sea Exploration. France supports the idea to extend the zone of responsibility of the Board of Fisheries of the north-eastern Atlantic, bearing in mind the fact that the EU is already a member of it [1].

France is very concerned in the lack of international regime of environmental management in conditions when it is planned to start production of oil and gas in the Arctic. Any accident similar to the one occurred in the Gulf of Mexico on British Petroleum platform would lead to even more serious consequences in the Arctic because the methods used in the southern latitudes for the oil spill, won't work in the north. The agreement regulating responsibility of countries for oil spills was worked out by the initiative of Norway, the USA and Russia in the Arctic Council and signed in 2013.

Conclusion

France is looking for legal grounds to play a more active role in the Arctic. It supports the adoption of representatives of the EU in the Arctic Council, believing that it will strengthen France's abilities to influence the decisions of the AC. Just France has made the greatest influence on forming the EU's Arctic policy.

France is not ready to accept such a situation, when eight members of the Arctic Council solve problems on behalf of all mankind. Some French experts and politicians stand for the introduction of international management Arctic mode that would equalize the rights of the

permanent members of the Arctic Council with observer countries. This view is not shared by circumpolar countries.

On the whole, Arctic policy of France reflects its general approach to the problems of global scale, that France considers as a tool to increase its influence on the global agenda by relying on international organizations, primarily the EU, NATO, the UN, but shows readiness for a dialogue with members of the Arctic Council, including Russia.

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