

## POLITICAL PROCESSES AND INSTITUTIONS

UDC: [339.92+347.173+578.4](491.1)(045)

DOI: 10.37482/issn2221-2698.2021.42.186

### Arctic Council: Outcome of the First Year of the Icelandic Presidency\*

© Valery P. ZHURAVEL, Cand. Sci (Ped.), leading researcher, head

E-mail: zhvalery@mail.ru

Center for Arctic Research, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

**Annotation.** In the article based on the report of the Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials in the Arctic Council, Einar Gunnarsson «Together on the road to a sustainable Arctic: one year in 2019-2021 of the presidency of Iceland», the first year of Iceland's Arctic Council presidency is reviewed by the Senior Officials Committee. Key priorities for action are identified, which are protecting the Arctic marine environment, combating ocean acidification; sustainable development of the fisheries sector; reducing ocean pollution; combating marine debris; combating climate change and introducing green energy; ensuring the sustainable development of the indigenous community of the Arctic; continuing to strengthen and enhance the role of the Arctic Council in maintaining peace, international cooperation and political stability in the Arctic region. Also, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Icelandic presidency and the development of Arctic cooperation are being considered. Of interest is the analysis of measures taken to counter the pandemic among the small indigenous communities of the North, Siberia and the Russian Far East. Iceland's plans for the second year of its chairmanship of the Arctic Council are indicated. The author also discusses Russian-Icelandic cooperation at the current stage in the economic field and in the sphere of inter-regional relations. It is noted that our countries share a common memory of the joint struggle against fascism, and Russia remembers with gratitude Iceland's contribution to the formation and support of polar convoys.

**Keywords:** Arctic Council, presidency, Iceland, Russia, environment, climate, small indigenous peoples.

#### Introduction

The Arctic Council (AC, Council) was formed on September 19, 1996 in Ottawa (Canada) by representatives of eight Arctic states: Denmark, Iceland, Canada, Norway, Russia, USA, Finland and Sweden.

On May 7, 2019, the chairmanship of the Council passed from Helsinki to Reykjavik. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland T. Soini handed over the chairmanship of the AC to Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland G.T. Thordarson for the next two-year period [1, Zhuravel V.P.]. It should be noted that Iceland held the AC chairmanship for the first time in 2002–2004. Since then the country has been actively engaged in the development of its national Arctic strategy and policy, has prepared a number of reports "Ocean — Iceland's policy" (2005), "North Meets North — Navigation and the Future of the Arctic" (2006), "Iceland at the Extreme North" (2009). Althing formulated 12 key provisions (principles) of the country's Arctic policy in its resolution of March 28, 2011.

While planning and implementing events for its first year of chairmanship in the Council, Iceland focused on protecting the Arctic marine environment, combating ocean acidification, sustainable development of the fishing sector, reducing ocean pollution, combating marine litter,

---

\* For citation: Zhuravel V.P. Arctic Council: Outcome of the First Year of the Icelandic Presidency. *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2021, no. 42, pp. 186–199. DOI: 10.37482/issn2221-2698.2021.42.186

combating climate change and introducing green energy, ensuring sustainable development of the indigenous community living in the Arctic, and continuing efforts to strengthen and enhance the role of the Arctic Council.

The theme of the Icelandic chairmanship program in the Arctic Council for 2019–2021 reflects Iceland's commitment to the principle of sustainable development and indicates the need for close cooperation between the states and peoples of the region and beyond through the work of six working groups: Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP); Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF); Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR); Protection of the Arctic Marine environment (PAME); Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG); Arctic Contaminants Action Program (ACAP).

On June 9, 2020, Einar Gunnarsson, the Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Arctic Council, published a report that summarizes the results of Iceland's first year of the Council's chairmanship with assessments of the widest range of Arctic issues<sup>1</sup>: combating marine litter, reducing ocean pollution, protecting the arctic marine environment, combating ocean acidification.

The first executive meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Arctic Council took place on June, 18–19 in Reykjavik. It was attended by indigenous peoples' organizations, as well as representatives of countries and international organizations with observer status.

The event focused on ways and means of reducing the threat of plastics contamination of the Arctic marine environment. It should be noted that since 2016 the Nordic countries have been conducting annual coastal clean-up activities in May. In 2019, as part of the initiative, more than 19 tons of garbage had been collected on the Icelandic coasts alone. The public organization "Ocean Conservancy" has been active in this direction, which since 1986 has been conducting annual activities for the clean-up marine and ocean territories in more than 150 countries under the general name "International Coastal Cleanup". Approximately 14 million volunteers have already taken part in cleaning up litter from beaches and coastlines.

During the discussion, the participants confirmed the relevance of the issue. According to statistics, more than 80% of marine pollution sources are land-based (coastal), including recreational wastes. It has been found that at least 60% of marine debris is plastic. Approximately 18% of plastic waste comes from the fishing industry [2, Kozlovskiy N.N., Blinovskaya Ya.Yu., p. 159]: foam plastic, plastic bags, disposable dishes, bottles for carbonated drinks, mineral water and juices, as well as fishing nets, polystyrene floats, etc. Plastic waste accumulates faster than any other, due to the growing volumes of its production. This waste forms huge areas of floating islands.

It was noted that the main tasks of combating marine litter will be to clean up Arctic beaches and waterways in all eight Arctic states, to identify sources of litter, to raise public aware-

---

<sup>1</sup> Together towards a sustainable Arctic: one year into the 2019-2021 Icelandic chairmanship. URL: <https://arctic-council.org/ru/news/one-year-into-the-2019-2021-icelandic-chairmanship/> (accessed 15 April 2019).

ness of the problems caused by marine litter and to encourage people to change their behavior in order to solve this problem [3, Bogdanova E.Yu.].

It was decided that the clean-up activities on the Arctic circumpolar coast will be carried out by the member countries in cooperation with the AC observer states, as well as with local organizations and individuals. During the consultation process, Ocean Conservancy representatives proposed identifying communities in each Arctic region that would be involved in coastal clean-up. They also drew attention to the need to have a sufficient amount of funds and mechanisms for work on the purification of resources and materials. It is noted that the International Coastal Cleanup project is fully suited to the objectives of Iceland's chairmanship of the Arctic Council, and can help to mobilize the public to address the challenges of protecting the Arctic marine environment from plastics contamination in the future.

Scientists have made a significant contribution to the study of microplastics and other pollutants. Studies have found that it is small, less than 5 mm, plastic particles that accumulate in the environment in large quantities, especially in aquatic ecosystems. The oceans today are a kind of repository of plastic mass, which mankind produces in huge quantities every year <sup>2</sup>.

Unfortunately, marine plastic research in Russia is at the very beginning. Currently, there is a lack of knowledge about its effects on living organisms, including humans. Thus, water samples taken during the expeditions of the Arctic Floating University in 2018 and 2019 <sup>3</sup> showed that the content of microplastics in the Novaya Zemlya area, in the east and in the central part of the Barents Sea, is much higher than in the west, where a lot of enterprises of industrialized European countries are located <sup>4</sup>. In the autumn of 2019, scientists from the Marine Research Center of Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov surveyed the waters of the White, Pechora, Kara, Laptev and East Siberian seas on the research vessel "Akademik Mstislav Keldysh". During the expedition, floating plastic was discovered in almost all shelf seas of the Russian Arctic. It was noted that the largest Siberian rivers Ob, Yenisei and Lena are likely to be the main sources of plastic pollution in the Arctic. In order to reduce plastic pollution, it is critical to improve the systems of river treatment facilities, as well as to minimize and, if possible, to eliminate production of expendable plastic products <sup>5</sup>.

Iceland, under its chairmanship in October 2019, with the participation of the Harvard Belfer Center for Science and International Relations, The Polar Institute of the Woodrow Wilson Sci-

---

<sup>2</sup> Dno Mirovogo okeana useyano plastikovym musorom [The bottom of the oceans is littered with plastic debris]. URL: <https://esoreiter.ru/news/0115/dno-mirovogo-okeana-useyano-plastikovym-musorom.html> (accessed 17 November 2015).

<sup>3</sup> This is a joint long-term project of the Northern Arctic Federal University and the Northern Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Directorate of Roshydromet.

<sup>4</sup> Uchenye: Barentsevo more na vostoke zagryazneno mikroplastikom bol'she, chem na zapade [Scientists: the Barents Sea in the east is more polluted with microplastics than in the west]. URL: <https://nauka.tass.ru/nauka/7479791>; Arkticheskiy Universitet provel analiz vody iz Barentseva morya [Arctic University analyzed water from the Barents Sea]. URL: <https://newinform.com/204311-arkticheskii-universitet-provel-analiz-vody-iz-barenceva-morya> (accessed 15 April 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Uchenye rasskazali, kak zashchitit' rossiyskuyu Arktiku ot mikroplastika [Scientists told how to protect the Russian Arctic from microplastics]. URL: <https://ria.ru/20200117/1563557024.html> (accessed 25 March 2020).

ence Center, held a seminar on policies and actions regarding plastic pollution of the Arctic Ocean

<sup>6</sup>.

In December 2019, Iceland hosted a side event on the acidification of the Arctic Ocean at the annual UN Climate Change Conference. During the event, leading international experts on ocean acidification discussed the chemical, biological and socio-economic impacts of acidification in the north, as well as possible solutions of the problem.

Iceland has been active in promoting innovation and biotechnology in the fisheries sector. Initiatives such as the "Blue Bioeconomy in the Arctic" project have great potential for promoting sustainable development, indicating their reliability in improving the well-being of the region <sup>7</sup>.

Within the framework of the international conference "Arctic Frontiers", held in January 2020 under the chairmanship of Iceland, a discussion forum and an interactive seminar were held, which made a certain contribution to raising awareness of the "Blue Bioeconomy" [4, Marchenkov M.L.].

In particular, the Working Group on the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME) has launched its "Plastic in a Bottle" program, which will allow tracking the movement of marine debris and plastic in Arctic waters and beyond. The capsule, equipped with a GPS transmitter, was launched by the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Iceland, Gudmundur Inga Gubbrandsson, from the Icelandic Coast Guard ship Thor in September 2019. In 207 days, the capsule passed more than 7 thousand km and reached the shores of the Tyri Island (Scotland) <sup>8</sup>.

The small island state has managed to dispose almost entirely of garbage on its territory. The protection of the Arctic marine environment is of key importance to Iceland. Given the importance of fish exports to the economy, Iceland constantly monitors plastic waste in Arctic waters. For example, more than 12,000 microplastic particles per liter of sea ice have been found in the Fram Strait (between eastern Greenland and Svalbard). Iceland expresses concern about excess plastic content in marine waters, which could affect the entire biological chain of flora and fauna in the Arctic <sup>9</sup>.

It should be noted that the working groups of the Arctic Council have made significant contributions to the expansion of knowledge and understanding of the marine environment. At the end of its chairmanship in May 2021, Iceland plans to submit a comprehensive regional action plan on marine litter and plastics in the Arctic to Arctic Council ministers.

---

<sup>6</sup> Together towards a sustainable Arctic: one year into the 2019-2021 Icelandic chairmanship. URL: <https://arctic-council.org/ru/news/one-year-into-the-2019-2021-icelandic-chairmanship/> (accessed 15 April 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Together towards a sustainable Arctic: one year into the 2019-2021 Icelandic chairmanship. URL: <https://arctic-council.org/ru/news/one-year-into-the-2019-2021-icelandic-chairmanship/> (accessed 15 April 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Арктические инициативы Islandii [Iceland's Arctic Initiatives] URL: <https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5dc69465c7891f51f5fb5143/arkiticheskie-initsiativy-islandii-5ed61c589934dc5998c067f8> (accessed 13 July 2019).

### *Sustainable development of the fishing sector*

Iceland took an active part in organizing and holding the III International Fisheries Forum and the Fish Industry, Seafood and Technologies Exhibition in St. Petersburg on July 10–11, 2019<sup>10</sup>. The event brought together representatives of more than 250 companies from 38 countries of the world in a total of about 6 thousand people. The main event of the fishing industry forum was the plenary session on the theme “Ocean of Opportunities: Nature, Economy, Human”. Industry experts and representatives of official delegations were at the panel sessions “Digitalization as a tool for transforming the fishery industry”, “How to sell fish properly”, “The Arctic and Antarctica: resource potential, prohibition or fishing, elements of cooperation”, “Unlocking the potential of aquaculture in Russia and the world: management, resources, markets”, “The value of the fishing industry: how to assess the efficiency of using a national resource by a business?”, “Fish market economics: fishing, processing, logistics, retail”, “Fishing: social dimension as a factor of territories development”. Iceland presented its national stand at the exhibition.

### *Climate issues, green energy*

Arctic air temperatures continue to rise more than double the global average. Rising temperatures accelerate the melting of snow and ice and have direct and indirect impacts on the interconnected ecosystems of the Arctic, with various economic and social implications for Arctic communities. Studies show that the Arctic climate is especially sensitive to air pollution [5, Matishov G.G., Dzhenyuk S.L., Moiseev D.V.; 6, Morozov A.]. In mid-July 2020, the head of Roshydromet, Igor Shumakov, noted that the decrease in the ice area is the main manifestation of changes in ice conditions in the Arctic. “For the Arctic as a whole, the minimum ice extent was observed in 2007 — 4.19 million square kilometers, in 2012 — 3.35 million square kilometers, in 2019 — 4.1 million square kilometers. For comparison, in 1980 the ice cover reached 7.6 million square kilometers, in 1983 — 7.28 million” emphasized I. Shumakov. He added that the ice cover is getting thinner in the Arctic seas of Russia<sup>11</sup>.

In order to overcome the negative consequences of climate change in the Arctic, it is necessary to develop strategies aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change, adapting the population to new weather conditions. The Arctic states and their partners should ensure that new economic activities, that became possible due to reduction of sea ice, are carried out on an ongoing basis in order to balance economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. This analytical and practical activity during the first year of Iceland's chairmanship was taken into account in the work of six working groups of the Council.

<sup>10</sup> Podvedeny itogi III Mezhdunarodnogo rybopromyshlennogo foruma [The results of the III International Fisheries Forum have been summed up]. URL: <http://fish.gov.ru/press-tsentr/novosti/27678> (accessed 13 July 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Rosgidromet otsenil masshtaby tayaniya l'dov v Severnom Ledovitom okeane [Roshydromet has estimated the extent of ice melting in the Arctic Ocean]. URL: <https://ria.ru/20200714/1574311928.html> (accessed 15 July 2020).

During its chairmanship, Iceland pays attention to the further development and application of practical solutions in the field of green energy in the Arctic region, which will allow communities to reduce emissions and improve air quality. Projects that promote knowledge sharing and support small and remote Arctic communities in the transition to sustainable energy will continue in 2019–2021.

### *Indigenous minorities*

The problem of indigenous minorities in the chairmanship of all Arctic states in the Arctic Council has always occupied a special place. Initiatives to improve the well-being of 4 million people who consider the northern region their home are at the heart of the Council's work. The current uncertain situation with the spread of the coronavirus pandemic is especially threatening for the remote Arctic communities.

The Third Executive Meeting of the Committee of Senior Officials of the Arctic Council was devoted to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the circumpolar North, the special circumstances and the unique medical, social and economic needs of the Arctic communities, which took place on 24–25 June 2020<sup>12</sup>. At this meeting, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland, Gudlaugurd Urdarson, critically identifying the problems of life of indigenous peoples, noted the importance of continuing the Council's work to solve the problems posed by COVID-19. In his statement, Einar Gunnarsson (Iceland), the Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials at the Arctic Council, stressed that the lack of necessary infrastructure, remoteness from medical centers, unreliable communications made the inhabitants of the Arctic especially vulnerable during a pandemic. James Stotts, President of the Alaska Inuit Circumpolar Council, noted that Inuit communities in the Arctic have historically suffered devastating human losses due to lack of immunity to disease, exacerbated by a lack of resources and infrastructure, necessary for effective prevention and response. Among the problems that have remained unresolved for decades, he cited overcrowded housing, lack of proper sanitation, drinking water and poor broadband; he suggested that the pandemic would exacerbate these problems, and national efforts would be made to address them. Stefan Skjaldarson, the Chairman of the Arctic Council Sustainable Development Working Group, noted that a lot has been done in recent years to support and improve the health, social, cultural and economic well-being of indigenous peoples and Arctic residents. But the spread of the coronavirus pandemic has shed light on the region's infrastructure deficit. The global health crisis presents a unique opportunity to better understand and support the sustainability of the Arctic region.

It should be noted that the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet, speaking on June 30, 2020 in Geneva at the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council, positively assessed Russia's efforts to protect indigenous peoples from a pandemic, noting that in the con-

---

<sup>12</sup> Circumpolar collaboration amidst coronavirus pandemic. URL: <https://arctic-council.org/ru/news/circumpolar-collaboration-amidst-coronavirus-pandemic/> (accessed 15 June 2020).

text of the pandemic, the Russian Federation is using telecommuting technologies to improve medical services for indigenous nomadic populations<sup>13</sup>.

For this meeting, the Association of Indigenous Minorities of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation prepared a report on the experience of countering coronavirus and the restrictive measures taken to reduce the spread of the disease. Thus, in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, where about 18 thousand Nenets reindeer herders are currently roaming, a system of response, information and assistance to indigenous communities has been built; a system of social payments was organized as well as a delivery of essential products.

Due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of places of indigenous minorities' residence, low social mobility and difficult access to relevant information and public services, there is a threat to the health of individuals and the peoples, whose population often does not exceed several thousand people. It is emphasized that there are additional risk factors for infection and the clinical severity of COVID-19 for people living in the Arctic, since deficiencies in iodine, calcium, zinc and vitamin D are widespread among them, which can negatively affect the course of the disease. Particular attention is paid to the preservation of life and health of the older generation, the elders, who are the bearers and keepers of the national heritage — language and original culture. The most important source of sustainability for indigenous peoples is their access to traditional products that are common for the northern peoples' diet: local fish and meat. It is noted that health and quality of life of the aborigines depend on the ability to keep food habits that have developed over centuries<sup>14</sup>. Indigenous people who have lost their attachment to traditional food are more susceptible to pathological disorders of the digestive, respiration, urinary systems, ENT-organs, immune and endocrine systems [7, Zhuravel' V.P.].

In response to the Coronavirus threat, the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs sent recommendations to the constituent entities of the Russian Federation in April — May 2020 to analyse the situation among indigenous minorities. They included support measures with a revision of the directions for spending federal subsidies for the development of indigenous peoples through the Agency in 2020. Special attention was paid to the need to ensure stable communication with communities of indigenous (autochthonous) peoples in remote areas, monitor their health status, access public services, provision of products and essential goods. The constituent entities of the Russian Federation formed working groups to organize the relevant work, which made it possible

---

<sup>13</sup> V OON pozitivno otsenili usiliya Rossii po zashchite korennykh narodov ot pandemii [The UN praised Russia's efforts to protect indigenous peoples from a pandemic]. URL: <http://www.raipon.info/info/news/4313/> (accessed 15 June 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Severnaya ryba i myaso – eto osnova zdorov'ya korenogo naseleniya. Assotsiatsiya podgotovila materialy dlya vstrechi Starshikh dolzhnostnykh lits Arkticheskogo soveta po koronavirusu [Northern fish and meat are the foundation of the health of the indigenous population. Association prepared materials for the meeting of Senior Arctic Council officials on coronavirus]. URL: <http://www.raipon.info/info/news/4287/> (accessed 15 June 2020).

to avoid massive coronavirus diseases, keeping feeling of stability and atmosphere of quick and managing solution to emerging problems<sup>15</sup>.

Currently, the Council's working groups are working on the implementation of 50 initiatives designed specifically to improve the situation of Arctic peoples and communities. The specificity of these projects varies depending on their economic potential, the level of participation of the younger generation, the incorporation of indigenous knowledge and, of course, health problems.

An important role in the development and strengthening of Arctic solidarity of indigenous minorities was played by the 6th Summit of Arctic Indigenous Leaders, which took place on November 13–15, 2019 in the capital of Lapland. The event was attended by official delegations from six indigenous organizations, representatives of the authorities of the Arctic states, representatives of the Arctic Council, members of parliaments of the Arctic countries, representatives of the UN, non-governmental organizations, scientists and experts. The speech of the President of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation, Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Nationalities G.P. Ledkov, was listened to with great attention and interest<sup>16</sup>.

### *Cooperation within the Arctic Council*

In connection with the growing interest of the world community in the problems of the Arctic in recent years, the role of the Council has increased significantly, not only in strengthening ties between the Arctic states, permanent participants and working groups, but also in intensifying further cooperation with its observers and interacting organizations.

Thus, in October 2019, a meeting was held under the chairmanship of Iceland with the participation of the Arctic Council and the Arctic Economic Council, which addressed the issues of broadening and strengthening their mutual cooperation.

On November 26, Russian and Icelandic Foreign Ministers Sergei Lavrov and Goodloygur Tor Tordarson signed a joint statement regarding the continuity of the chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Following the meeting, the Russian Foreign Minister noted: "There are no plans to increase the number of members of the Arctic Council; no one has put forward such ideas. Observer status is open to all applicants. We do not see any contraindications against obtaining observer status for countries that are really ready to participate in the work in a non-politicized, pragmatic way, with full respect for the basic decisions taken by the "Arctic Eight". The Icelandic Foreign Minister supported the position of the Russian colleague: "I believe that the balance that now exists among the members of the Arctic Council and the observer countries is already quite stable and

---

<sup>15</sup> V OON otsenili usiliya Rossiyskoy Federatsii po zashchite korennykh malochislennykh narodov vo vremya pandemii koronavirusnoy infektsii [The UN assessed the efforts of the Russian Federation to protect indigenous peoples during the coronavirus pandemic]. URL: <http://fadn.gov.ru/news/2020/07/03/4091-v-oon-otsenili-usiliya-rossiyskoy-federatsii-po-zaschite-korennyh-malochislennyh-narodov-vo-vremya-pandemii-koronavirusnoy-infektsii> (accessed 15 June 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Lidery korennykh narodov Arktiki sobralis' v Rovaniemi [Arctic indigenous leaders gather in Rovaniemi]. URL: <http://www.raipon.info/info/news/4014/> (accessed 15 June 2020).

good. I agree that there is no reason to expand the membership of the Arctic Council. The system we have now is very successful," underlined Goodloygur Tor Tordarson<sup>17</sup>.

Arctic cooperation between Iceland and Russia has a long tradition. Despite the persisting "sanctions" restrictions, the countries were able to reverse the negative trend in trade. The Icelandic-Russian Chamber of Commerce has been set up, with the participation of more than 30 companies from Iceland, and the geography of interregional ties is expanding. The Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Kamchatka Territory, Chukotka, and Murmansk Region interact with Icelandic partners. Important projects are being implemented in the field of innovative technologies, telecommunications and geothermal energy. The involvement of Icelandic companies in the modernization programme of the Russian fishing fleet, the design of modern vessels and the supply of equipment is noted.

Both countries are united by the common memory of the joint struggle against fascism. Russia remembers the contribution of Iceland to the formation and support of polar convoys with gratitude<sup>18</sup>. Mutual Russian-Icelandic Arctic cooperation is largely facilitated by the activities of the Russian Ambassador A.V. Vasil'ev in Iceland, who had previously been the Special Assignment Ambassador of the Russian Foreign Ministry to the Arctic Council for a long time.

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that in modern conditions, preparations are underway to reformat the ownership of the Arctic space. There are increasing calls for the internationalization of the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage, and the extension of the Antarctic Treaty to the Arctic is proposed. The Arctic region is not an isolated enclave of international life, living by different rules, unlike the rest of the world community.

According to Yu.F. Lukin [8, Lukin Yu.F., p. 213–214; 9, Fedorov V.P., Zhuravel V.P., Grinyaev S.N., Medvedev D.A.], three options are possible for the transforming the Arctic Council in the short, medium and long term:

- preservation of the previous model of the Arctic Council: to leave everything as it is, without fundamental changes, without interrupting the activities of the Arctic Council in the traditional format, without addressing the still pressing political issues of military security, geopolitics, economics;
- modernization of the Arctic Council in the medium term, taking into account the growing role and influence of observer states, the activities of the Arctic Economic Council, and the expansion of the range of issues discussed;

---

<sup>17</sup> RF i Islandiya prinyali zayavlenie o preemstvennosti v predsedatel'stve v Arkticheskom sovete [Russian Federation and Iceland adopted a statement of succession in the chairmanship of the Arctic Council]. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/7201401> (accessed 15 June 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Vystuplenie i otvety na voprosy SMI Ministra inostrannykh del Rossiyskoy Federatsii S.V. Lavrova v khode sovместnoy press-konferentsii s Ministrom inostrannykh del Islandii G.T. Tordarsonom, Moskva, 26 noyabrya 2019 goda [Speech and answers to media questions by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov during a joint press conference with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iceland G.T. Thordarson, Moscow, November 26, 2019]. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/organizacia-po-zapreseniu-himiceskogo-oruzia/-/asset\\_publisher/km9HkaXMTium/content/id/3919554](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/organizacia-po-zapreseniu-himiceskogo-oruzia/-/asset_publisher/km9HkaXMTium/content/id/3919554) (accessed 15 April 2019).

- transformation of the Arctic Council into a standard international organization of a regional character with the right to adopt regulations that are sources of public international law.

In our opinion, the issue of changing the functionality of the Arctic Council is linked both to objective trends within the organization itself and with processes taking place directly in and around the Arctic region. It is important for Russia to keep the first option, as it is more in line with our national interests. It is important to predict the development of the Russian Arctic in real processes, to see its strengths and weaknesses [10, Zaikov K.S., Kondratov N.A., Kudryashova E.V., Lipina S.A., Chistobaev A.I.].

In 2020, the Russian Federation began preparations for its upcoming chairmanship of the Arctic Council and the Arctic International Forum “Arctic — Territory of Dialogue”, which will take place in 2021 in St. Petersburg, and adopted an important strategic document on the development of the Arctic up to 2035<sup>19</sup>.

### Conclusion

The results of the first year of the Iceland’s chairmanship show that the Council countries continue to search for a balance between the three main areas of sustainable development: economic growth, social integration and environmental protection.

Einar Gunnarsson, the Chairman of the Committee of Senior Officials in the Arctic Council, noted in his report that “although most of the events are currently being conducted online, Iceland continues to develop cooperation and interaction, thereby maintaining unity between the various elements of the Arctic Council. We have adapted and developed innovative solutions, and the resilience and solidarity that we have shown in the face of extreme circumstances give me reason to believe in the success of our cause to achieve sustainable development in the Arctic. It is in such difficult times that the necessity for close circumpolar cooperation is especially acute”<sup>20</sup>.

As the analysis shows, Iceland plans to continue monitoring and analyzing climate impacts in the Arctic region in the second year of its chairmanship, which can form the basis for the development of national policies. The results of the work of the expert group on black carbon and methane could lay the foundation for efforts to reduce emissions of pollutants, which will slow down the pace of climate change in the Arctic. Energy security will continue in remote Arctic communities, and the Council will promote the development and implementation of green energy solutions to reduce emissions and improve air quality. Attention will be paid to the discussion of such important issues of the Arctic development as the development of new technologies, the develop-

---

<sup>19</sup> Ob Osnovakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2035 goda. Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii ot 5 marta 2020 g. № 164 [On the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period up to 2035. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of March 5, 2020, no. 164]. URL: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/f8ZpjhpAaQ0WB1zjywN04OgKil1mAvaM.pdf> (accessed 06 March 2020).

<sup>20</sup> Together towards a sustainable Arctic: one year into the 2019-2021 Icelandic chairmanship. URL: <https://arctic-council.org/ru/news/one-year-into-the-2019-2021-icelandic-chairmanship/> (accessed 15 April 2019).

ment of human capital, the economics of the Arctic zone development, resource management and sustainable development.

In the first year of its chairmanship Iceland was just starting its work. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, some of the events were held online, a lot of them were canceled. A symposium on plastics in the Arctic, a large-scale action "Cleaning up the Arctic coastline" and the project "Logistics in the Arctic" are among them. The main forums, sessions and meetings are planned to be held in the second half of 2020 and in spring of 2021. Preparations are under way for an international symposium in Reykjavik on plastic purification techniques for Arctic waters at the end of October 2020.

Iceland's current chairmanship is proceeding with restraint, and there is no reason to accuse Reykjavik of lobbying for China's interests, as it was in 2008–2009. At the same time, militarily and geopolitically, Iceland is largely dependent on the United States. However, the chosen moderate course of the chairmanship does not allow speaking of Washington's excessive influence on Iceland's presidency of the Council. But it should be taken into account that US Vice President M. Pence visited the island state in September 2019. During the visit, an investment of \$ 56 million into the infrastructure of a military base in Keflavik was announced, which will not only create 300 new jobs<sup>21</sup>, but also introduce a new round of the military-political complications in the Arctic region.

Analyzing and evaluating the activities of Iceland's chairmanship of the Arctic Council, it is necessary to support its multi-vector work on investment and development of Arctic tourism. In 2018, 2.2 million tourists visited the country, and in 2019 — almost 2 million people<sup>22</sup>. The experience of Arctic tourism in Iceland, in our opinion, is advanced and can certainly be borrowed by other countries.

The AC is currently implementing a number of interesting projects and programs under the leadership of Iceland. These include projects to find effective solutions for solid waste management, waste management in small Arctic communities. Scientists are also trying to understand the impact of plastic on bird migration in the Arctic. Iceland intends to make significant adjustments to existing environmental standards in Arctic countries.

According to our estimates, the Republic of Iceland as a whole will be able to implement the declared program, will try to interact with all countries, will not abuse its chairmanship and will not lobby for China's interests on Arctic issues, as was the case in 2008–2014. However, given Iceland's dependence on the United States, Canada and Norway in its Arctic policy, can result in both weakening and exacerbation of current tensions in Russian-American and Russian-European

---

<sup>21</sup> SShA rezko aktivizirovalis' v Arktike: M. Pens ob'yavilsya v Islandii [The United States has sharply intensified in the Arctic: M. Pence showed up in Iceland]. URL: <https://aftershock.news/?q=node/786261&full> (accessed 15 December 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Arkticheskie initsiativy Islandii [Iceland's Arctic Initiatives]. URL: <https://zen.yandex.ru/media/id/5dc69465c7891f51f5fb5143/arkticheskie-initsiativy-islandii-5ed61c589934dc5998c067f8> (accessed 15 June 2020).

relations. This issue is very important for Russia, since the chairmanship of the Arctic Council will pass to it in 2021.

Cooperation within the AU continues to develop successfully. The Arctic still remains a zone of peace, international cooperation and political stability, despite the emerging environmental risks and military-political threats.

## References

1. Zhuravel' V.P. Predsedatel'stvo v Arkticheskom sovete: ot Finlyandii k Islandii [The Chairmanship in the Arctic Council: from Finland to Iceland]. *Sovremennaya Evropa* [Contemporary Europe], 2019, no. 4, pp. 97–108. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15211/soveurope4201997107>
2. Kozlovskiy N.N., Blinovskaya Ya.Yu. Mikroplastik — makroproblema Mirovogo okeana [Microplastic is World Ocean Marcoproblem]. *Mezhdunarodnyy zhurnal prikladnykh i fundamental'nykh issledovaniy* [International Journal of Applied and Fundamental Research], 2015, no. 10, pp. 159–162.
3. Bogdanova E.Yu. K voprosu ob unifikatsii protsedury otsenki vozdeystviya na okruzhayushchuyu sredu v priarkticheskikh gosudarstvakh [On the Issue of Unification of the Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure in the Arctic States]. *Probely v rossiyskom zakonodatel'stve* [Gaps in Russian legislation], 2019, no. 4, pp. 27–30.
4. Marchenkov M.L. International Dialogue at the “Arctic Frontiers”: Experience and Contemporary Challenges. *Vestnik Severnogo (Arkticheskogo) federal'nogo universiteta. Ser.: Gumanitarnye i sotsial'nye nauki* [Vestnik of Northern (Arctic) Federal University. Series "Humanitarian and Social Sciences"], 2020, no. 3, pp. 105–109. DOI: [10.37482/2227-6564-V025](https://doi.org/10.37482/2227-6564-V025)
5. Matishov G.G., Genyuk S.L., Moiseev D.V. Klimat i bol'shie morskije ekosistemy Arktiki [Climate and the Large Marine Arctic Ecosystems]. *Vestnik Rossiyskoy akademii nauk* [Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences], 2017, vol. 87, no. 2, pp. 110–120. DOI: [10.7868/S0869587317020086](https://doi.org/10.7868/S0869587317020086)
6. Morozov A. Arktika — klyuch k klimaticheskim izmeneniyam [The Arctic is the Key to Climate Change]. *Energiya: ekonomika, tekhnika, ekologiya* [Energy: Economics, Technology, Ecology], 2019, no. 6, pp. 10–13.
7. Zhuravel' V.P. Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Arctic: Problems and Solutions. *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2018, no. 30, pp. 62–78. DOI: [10.17238/issn2221-2698.2018.30.76](https://doi.org/10.17238/issn2221-2698.2018.30.76)
8. Lukin Yu.F. *Rossiyskaya Arktika v izmenyayushchemsya mire: monografiya* [The Russian Arctic in a Changing World]. Arkhangelsk, NArFU Publ., 2013, 281 p.
9. Federov V.P., Zhuravel V.P., Grinyaev S.N., Medvedev D.A. Scientific Approaches to Defining the Territorial Boundaries of the Arctic. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*, 2019, vol. 302, iss. 1. DOI: [10.1088/1755-1315/302/1/012012](https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/302/1/012012)
10. Zaikov K.S., Kondratov N.A., Kudryashova E.V., Lipina S.A., Chistobaev A.I. Scenarios for the Development of the Arctic Region (2020–2035). *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2019, no. 35, pp. 4–19. DOI: [10.17238/issn2221-2698.2019.35.5](https://doi.org/10.17238/issn2221-2698.2019.35.5)

Received on July 22, 2020