

Russia and Norway agree the maritime border

Iwona Wiśniewska

On 15 September in Murmansk, the Russian and Norwegian ministers of Foreign Affairs signed an agreement on the definition of their maritime border and concerning their cooperation on the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean. The agreement marks an end to the 40 year territorial dispute between the two countries. It also eases pressure in the region and has opened up the possibility of furthering the exploitation of an area potentially rich in natural resources. It appears that Russia's constructive stance on the issue of its maritime border with Norway is aimed at strengthening its negotiating position in the dispute with Canada concerning the division of the Arctic. Another of Russia's aims will be to influence NATO policy, including discouraging NATO from becoming involved in the region. Furthermore, signing the agreement with Norway gives substance to Russia's new, non-confrontational foreign policy tactic focused on economic cooperation with the world and attracting capital and technology into Russia.

The Norwegian-Russian territorial dispute

The unregulated maritime border has been the main problem in Russia-Norwegian relations. Negotiations concerning the definition of exclusive economic zones and the demarcation of the continental shelf of Russia and Norway had been ongoing since 1970. The two parties had been unable to come to an understanding on their maritime border; the dispute was over an area of 175,000 km² (approx. 12% of the Barents Sea) which is especially attractive for fishing. Since 1975 there has been a moratorium on tests and the extraction of natural resources in the disputed area. It only became possible to reach a compromise on the issue of the maritime border in 2010 when a statement was signed at the highest level in April. The Russian-Norwegian agreement on the demarcation of the maritime border must still be ratified by the parliaments of both countries (expected by the end of the year).

The main stipulations of the agreement

The two parties agreed to an even (as regards the size of the territory) division of the disputed maritime areas. In addition to an unambiguous marking out of the border, the agreement also contains two annexes: one recognising cross-border deposits of natural resources as common and allowing only joint Russian-Norwegian exploitation; the second defines the fishing regulations (e.g. during the next 15 years the rules negotiated between the USSR and Norway will remain in force). The agreement however makes no mention of

the issue of fishing regulation around Spitsbergen, an area which both sides interpret differently.

Russia's intentions in signing the agreement

One of the main motives Russia had in signing the agreement with Norway was the desire to strengthen its negotiating position in talks concerning the division of the Arctic with other countries in the region, especially with Canada. The dispute between Russia and Canada is over the division of the Arctic shelf which is potentially rich in deposits. This dispute remains unresolved and the UN has been seeking a solution to it since 2001. In recent days Norway's minister of Foreign Affairs has come out in favour of a bilateral Russian-Canadian agreement on the issue; this is in line with Russia's intentions.

Security reasons were also doubtless an important factor for Russia in signing the agreement with Norway since regulating the border dispute eliminates one of the chief sources of tension in bilateral relations. This will also reduce the need for NATO forces to be present in the region. President Dmitri Medvedev referred to this during the press conference following the signing of the agreement, stating that the Arctic should be an area of peaceful economic cooperation, without a NATO presence. According to Medvedev, the Russian-Norwegian agreement serves as a shining example of this. It seems likely that Russia is counting on a gradual evolution in Norway's stance on security and defence matters which will work in Russia's favour. On the one hand it concerns NATO policy (in the discussion on NATO's new strategic conception, Oslo has declared itself in favour of *inter alia* maintaining the priority for NATO of military functions and the confirmation of NATO being a guarantor of security). On the other hand, it concerns security policy in the region (Norway is promoting a tightening of defence cooperation with the Nordic countries, including Sweden and Finland – neither of which are in NATO). This policy runs contrary to Russia's interests.

Furthermore, following the improvement in relations with Norway, Russia is hoping to gain access to the advanced marine technologies of Norwegian mining firms. It will also be hoping to attract Norwegian capital towards investing in Russia. The settling of the 40 year border dispute with Norway should serve these aims by demonstrating the new cooperative (as opposed to the recent confrontational) tactic in foreign affairs being promoted by President Medvedev.

The consequences of the signature of the contract

Settling the border issue with Norway will remove one of the main sources of tension in relations between the two countries (in the past they have accused each other of e.g. illegal fishing in their waters; there have been cases of pursuit and the confiscation of fishing boats). Furthermore, there should be an elevated sense of security for Norway whose main threat comes precisely from that region. It is, however, unlikely that the agreement with Russia will have led to a fundamental change in the chief guidelines of Norway's security

policy.

The settlement between Russia and Norway will set in motion the process of dividing control of the Arctic which, in the future, will open up the possibility of the exploitation of deposits of natural resources (on the basis of satellite observations, these are estimated as being as high as 25% of global petroleum and natural gas reserves). The ratification of the Russian-Norwegian agreement recently signed will bring an end to the moratorium on the exploitation of potential fossil fuel deposits in the disputed area. The location and surveying of the deposits along with their exploitation will however require a large amount of time (approx. 15 years) and will be highly expensive due to technical issues (e.g. the depth of the sea, the distance from land).

cooperation Marek Menkiszak