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Abstract

This article analyzes the interests of the Italian Republic in the Arctic. Despite the geographical remoteness of Italy from the Arctic, the interest of the Italians to the Arctic cooperation due to historical reasons: the Italians were involved in the study of the Arctic since the late XIX century. Scientific achievements in the field of Arctic studies ensured Italy a place in the “Arctic club non-Arctic countries”. In 2013 Italy became an observer in the Arctic Council and in 2016 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy presented the document “The Italian strategy in the Arctic”, where the country’s interests in the region were defined. Thus, Italy has outlined the importance of the Arctic areas in its policy. The last part of this article is devoted to the Italian-Russian cooperation in the Arctic. Russia is one of the most important partners of Italy in the Arctic affairs. Because the economic interests have priority for both parties, the main bilateral cooperation projects focused in the field of energy and transport. The author concludes that in the short term Italy will develop its Arctic diplomacy and policy mainly through scientific and economic cooperation on all levels.

Key words

Arctic, Italy, strategy, diplomacy, international cooperation, Arctic Council, permanent observer, Russia, European Union, ENI, Rosneft, Arctic policy.

Introduction

The contemporary foreign policy of Italy is characterized by a persistent aspiration to regain the status of a “great power”. As a result in recent decades Italy’s foreign policy has been marked by robust dynamics on the world arena. Some completely new directions in Italy’s foreign policy have been outlined. Sometimes they are quite “exotic” for this country, as, for example, the Arctic dimension. But as Italian Ambassador to Norway *Giorgio Novello* put it Italy’s remoteness from the Arctic region is a superficial impression. The events in the Arctic are acquiring global dimension and Italy should not stay aside from both the opportunities and challenges of this northern region.¹

The purpose of this paper is to analyze interests, prospects and an emerging strategy of Italy in the Arctic, taking into account the history of Italian involvement in the Arctic affairs and its current position in the region.

The methodological and analytical approach is based on a systemic analysis that helps us to understand the structure of the Italian activity in the Arctic and the forms of its involvement in the Arctic cooperation. We use a case study approach for data collection, particularly through document study and a review of some reports.

Structurally, the paper consists of 3 sections. In the first one the author gives a consideration of the historical background of Italian presence in the Arctic. The second part is devoted to the analysis of the text of a first version of Italy’s Strategy for the Arctic in which the main elements of the current Italian policy in the region are presented. In the last part, the prospects of Italian-Russian cooperation in the Arctic are considerate.

¹ The non-Arctic countries are showing interest in the Arctic. URL: <http://www.arctic-info.ru/news/21-01-2014/nearkticeskie-strani-proavlaut-interes-k-arktike>.

History of Italy’s involvement in the Arctic

Notwithstanding Italy’s geographic remoteness from the Arctic, Italian interest in the Arctic cooperation is pre-conditioned by both pragmatic and historical reasons.

For the first time, interest in reaching the North Pole was shown in Italy at the end of XIX century. For instance, in this period on the initiative of *Luigi Amedeo (Prince of the Savoy and Duke of the Abruzzi)* Italy’s first expeditions to the Arctic were organized: in 1899 he launched an expedition by the steam whaling boat “*Stella Polare*”, which started out from Arkhangelsk. Later on in the 1920-s (1926 and 1928) the Arctic expeditions were arranged with the involvement of the Italian explorer *Umberto Nobile*. Evaluating *L. Amedeo and U. Nobile’s* contribution to Italy’s history, *M. Tornetta*, the Italian diplomat, notes that due to *L. Amedeo and U. Nobile* “Italy discovered its “Northern dimension”.²

In the second half of XX century Italy was actively exploring both Poles thanks to the activity of *Silvio Zavatti* – the Italian explorer, politician and anthropologist. He established the Institute of Polar Exploration (actually known as Istituto Geografico Polare “*Silvio Zavatti*”) in 1944 featured a landmark in Italian exploration of the Arctic, because it is the only institution in Italy to deal with the polar explorations up to now. The primary objective of the Institute is spreading of knowledge about the Arctic and the Antarctic in Italy and abroad. Since 1945 the Institute has been bringing out the journal “*Pole*” (“*Il Polo*”), which is devoted to various aspects of polar explorations. It is published in Italian and English. Besides that the library was founded in this Institute, where a

² Tornetta M. From the Heart of the Mediterranean to the North Pole: Italy’s Commitment on the Arctic region // *The Arctic Herald*, № 4(12), 2014. p.11.

collection of periodical publications from all over the world on the Polar issues are represented, and the Polar Museum was opened, where the artifacts collected during the Italian polar expeditions are exhibited.³ Today this Institute is a unique center of Polar studies in Italy and an integral part of the Arctic' international scientific cooperation.

Italy has become one of the leading non-Arctic countries in scientific explorations of this region. Italy's National Council on Scientific Research has been playing a central role, which had become instrumental in the Arctic on the Norwegian territory in the late 1990-s, and in the early 2000-s other Italian scientific institutions opened their branches in various districts of the Arctic. A good example is the Italian Arctic station "*Dirigibile Italia*" (1997) located in New-Aalesund, on the Norwegian territory of the Spitzbergen archipelago, and features a center for interdisciplinary studies.⁴The station is run by Italy's National Research Council, and its functioning is guided by the Department on Environment of the Council (POLARNET). It is precisely there that major part of the Italian Arctic scientific research is carried out.

Italy in the modern Arctic: political dimension

Today Italy is one of the European non-Arctic countries that gained the status of Permanent Observer in the Arctic Council (2013). On the one hand, it is an acknowledgment of Italian achievements in exploring the Arctic, and, on the other hand, it is a new responsibility

³ Introduzione al MuseoPolare. URL: <http://www.museopolare.it/Museo.htm>.

⁴ Base Artica CNR "*Dirigibile Italia*". URL: <http://www.polarnet.cnr.it/content/view/162/58/lang.it/>.

of the Italian Republic, envisaging the ever increasing activity in the region. According to the former Minister *Franco Frattini*, the role of Italy in the Arctic Council is a role of a mediator between the small European arctic countries (Sweden, Finland and Denmark) and the arctic great powers (Russia, Canada and the USA).⁵ As observer in the AC Italy has not a strong political influence in the Arctic affairs, but in economic and scientific spheres of cooperation in the Arctic the Italian Republic has a quite strong position. Thus, despite the fall in world oil prices and withdrawal of most energy companies out of the Arctic, the Italian ENI intends going on developing oil and gas deposits on the North together with the Norwegian company Statoil, which will operate in the area of Goliat.⁶

After receiving the observer status in the AC, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Farnesina) was actively involved in the Arctic affairs. At the end of 2015, the Ministry of foreign affairs of the Italian Republic published a first version of Italy's Strategy for the Arctic "*Towards an Italian strategy for the Arctic – National Guidelines*".⁷ The text contains historical background and purpose of the modern Italy's presence in the Arctic. According to the document, the Italian activities in the Arctic are in the so-called "five dimensions": political, environmental, social-humanitarian (human), research and economic. This document has not yet become an official Italian strategy in the Arctic, but can be considered as an attempt to formulate the strategic interests of the Republic in the Arctic in the future, as it is evident from the title of the document. According to this document modern Italian activities in the Arctic are realized at the several levels: international, national and informal.

At this stage Italy aims at strengthening its positions in the Arctic Council. Italy participates in the work of the Arctic Council at all levels: from the Task forces to Working groups, where it has an opportunity to make its significant contribution to the development of various areas of cooperation.

⁵ L'Artico, l'Europa e l'Italia. ParlaFrattini. URL: <http://formiche.net/2016/02/26/artico-italia-frattini/>.

⁶ *Sylvers, E.* Italy's Eni Plans to Pump Arctic Oil, After Others Abandon the Field / The Wall Street Journal. November 23, 2015. URL: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/italys-eni-set-to-begin-arctic-oil-quest-even-as-others-abandon-field-1448274602>.

⁷ Verso una strategia italiana per l'Artico. URL:http://www.esteri.it/mae/it/politica_estera/aree_geografiche/europa/artico/.

In the document mentioned above special attention is paid to the key role of the European Union in the field of protection of the Arctic environment and sustainable development. Italy sees itself as the “conductor” of European interests in the region.⁸ Italy has been granted the observer status of the AC while the European Union was denied it. But like other European countries-observers – EU members (e.g. France), Italy has consistently advocated the importance of the EU involvement in solving urgent problems of the Arctic region and supports the idea of giving the observer status to the EU in 2017.

Italy, as a member of the AC, respects the sovereign rights of the Arctic States and is ready to develop bilateral cooperation with them in various fields: from scientific cooperation to economic cooperation. The Embassies of Italy in the Arctic States hold various events to increase the presence of Italy in the Arctic (in Finland in 2013, in Russia, Canada and Norway in 2014, etc.). Italy’s key partners in the region are Norway and Russia. Besides Italy has established informal relations with the Saami Council. Italy holds regular informal consultations with other non-Arctic countries (e.g., China) on topical issues of development of the region.

At national level, according to the document, the government of Italy intends to continue to support Italian research centers working on Arctic projects: National Research Council of Italy (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (CNR), the National Institute of geophysics and volcano studies (Istituto Nazionale di Geologia e Vulcanologia (INGV)), the National Institute of oceanography and marine geophysics (Istituto Nazionale di Oceanografia e di Geofisica Sperimentale (OGS)), the National meteorological institute (Istituto Nazionale di Ricerca Meteorologica (INRIM)), the National Institute of astrophysics (Istituto Nazionale di Astrofisica (INAF)) and Italy’s Universities (e.g., l’Università di Roma La Sapienza).⁹

Besides that Italy will contribute to the increase the activity of civil society in this area. The general trend of contemporary Arctic cooperation is the attraction of the business community to the solution

⁸ Caruso, A. La geopolitica dell’Artico. URL: http://italian.ruvr.ru/2014_06_16/La-geopolitica-dell-Artico-2004/.

⁹ Novello G. at Arctic Circle 2014 “Italy in the Arctic”. URL: <http://vimeo.com/111399255>.

of the Arctic problems. In the context of its business activities, Italy pays particular attention to involvement in the Arctic Economic Council, established in 2013, which is designed to facilitate development of business in the Arctic and promote close economic cooperation among the AC members in compliance with the Sustainable Development principles. For Italy it is a good opportunity to deepen business contacts with other Arctic players. In this context it is interesting to mention such Italian initiative as the “Arctic table” (“Tavolo Artico”), which at national level represents a number of informal events to exchange views with representatives of Italian business and civil society. As *M. Tornetta* remarks, “ENI has become the first foreign stakeholder in the Norwegian part of the Arctic, this company develops there Italy’s first offshore project “Goliat”, which is set to enter the operational stage soon”.¹⁰ Nowadays ENI is implementing projects in the 3 Arctic regions – in Norway (the Barents Sea), Russia (Yamal) and in Alaska. ENI features one of the largest Italian companies to valiantly carry out projects in environment protection and education.¹¹ Many Italian companies following suit of ENI, the biggest Italian energy company, are ever more manifesting their interest in the Arctic: for instance, BECROMAL, Magma Energy Italia, Valvitalia, Telespazio and others. Most of the mentioned companies develop oil and gas fields.

After all, Italy is one of the crucial maritime powers, by virtue whereof it has formidable experience both in navigation and shipbuilding.

Italy is actively involved in governmental and non-governmental levels in the regional activities of informal organizations, as, for example, the conference the “Arctic Circle” and “Arctic frontiers”.

¹⁰ Tornetta M. From the Heart of the Mediterranean to the North Pole: Italy’s Commitment on the Arctic region // The Arctic Herald, № 4(12), 2014. p.16.

¹¹ May 6, 2013 - Venice, Italy: The Climate Challenge in the Arctic. Environmental impacts, new opportunities and future policy options: Interview with Peter Wadhams, University of Cambridge. URL: <http://www.feem.it/getpage.aspx?id=6007&sez=For%20the%20media&padre=22&idsub=108>.

Russian-Italian cooperation in the Arctic: problems and prospects of cooperation

Italy is one of the paramount strategic partners of Russia in contemporary Europe, with which “intensive cooperation throughout all directions has been up-and-running”.¹² One of such directions nowadays is the bilateral Arctic cooperation which has a historical background. For instance, the Soviet ice-breaker “*Krasin*” participated in the expedition on rescuing *U. Nobile’s* crew in 1928. Interestingly, in 1931 *U. Nobile* moved to the USSR, where he lived for four years and took part in building Soviet dirigibles, then “Aeroflot” airlines.

At present, Italy is an observer in the Arctic Council and in this context relations between the two countries are being intensified. The following domains seem to dominate the Italian-Russian Arctic cooperation, these are: economics, energy production, cutting-edge technologies, transport.

One of the main segments of the Russian-Italian cooperation in the Arctic has been energy with the Italian corporation ENI playing one of the key roles. The agreement on strategic partnership with the Italian energy corporation was signed in April 2012. This Agreement envisages the involvement of ENI in development of the Barents Sea offshore areas (the Fedynskoe and Central-Barents areas). According to the treaty, seismic survey is set for 2016–2018, exploratory well drilling – for 2025–2026. Expenditures on geological prospecting and exploration works will be financed by ENI, furthermore, it possesses necessary drilling technologies, which the Russian companies are not rich in. In exchange for that, ENI will grant “Rosneft” its share in the

12 Russian-Italian relations. URL: <http://roma.mid.ru/rossijsko-ital-anskie-otnosenia>.

foreign joint ventures. The key attractive factor for ENI is tax benefits, which had been previously affirmed by the Russian government. In 2013 under the aegis of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) “Rosneft” and ENI concluded the final agreement and Declaration on environment protection and conservation of biological diversity while conducting exploration and development of mineral resources on the Arctic continental shelf of the Russian Federation. The companies are intent on implementing regular monitoring of changes in natural landscape and seas of the Arctic, development of international cooperation with account for the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS). With the purpose of implementing the provisions of the Declaration “Rosneft” and partners will look into the opportunity for establishment of the Coordinating centre with the assistance of representatives from the Federal space agency (Roskosmos), Ministry for Transport and Emergency Ministry of Russia.

In December 2013 the Memorandum on the Russian-Italian joint venture with Italian ship-building corporation “Fincantieri” was signed. It will be constructing a drilling vessel worth 1 billion euro. The vessel is designated for operations in the Russian Arctic with the ice up to 1.5 meters in thickness.¹³ This Treaty was set to open up the way to other similar treaties, as according to the corporate information, by 2030 Russia will have required not less than ten drilling vessels. Ships will be built in partnership with the Krylov State Research and Development center, which leads the scientific segment of Russian shipbuilding, particularly, the center was working out a series of the offshore installations (for instance, over the “Prirazlomnaya” platform). Within the agreement validity term of 5 years, the partners should conduct joint research-and-development activities. Collaborative activity will allow the companies to open a new chapter in the specialized shipbuilding and Russian-Italian cooperation history. Building of the drilling vessel is a key element in full-scale Italian-Russian partnership in the Arctic.

The current phase of the Russian-Italian relations is mainly determined by the common European politics. Although is the current climate of crisis conditions and deterioration in relations between

13 [Staalesen](http://barentsobserver.com/ru/energiya/2013/12/italyanskaya-arkticheskaya-strategiya-razvorachivaetsya-na-fronte-rossiyskoy) A. The Italian Arctic strategy is expanding at the front of Russia’s oil production. URL: <http://barentsobserver.com/ru/energiya/2013/12/italyanskaya-arkticheskaya-strategiya-razvorachivaetsya-na-fronte-rossiyskoy>.

Russia and the EU, Italy is one of the few countries which critically look at the sanctions, imposed on Russia, and actively advocate the revival of the Russian-European relations. During its presidency in the EU Italy was making efforts at restoring relations between the EU and Russia that had been defined as one of the priorities in Italy's presidency in the EU in 2014.¹⁴ However, as an EU member, "Italy has been able to build its position with an eye to this fact."¹⁵

In 2014, two important events influenced the plans of development of the Arctic shelf: the fall in oil prices and the introduction of sanctions against Russian offshore oil production from the USA and EU countries. Both factors contributed to the fact that many of the energy projects with participation of Russian companies (especially "Rosneft") were "frozen".

Against this background the signing of the tri-lateral Agreement on strategic partnership between the Russian state company "Rostekh", the Italian corporation "Finmeccanica" – one of the largest machine-building holding companies of Italy and the oil company "Rosneft" became a milestone in the late 2014. In accordance with the agreement between 3 partners "HeliVert", located in Moscow region (a joint enterprise of the "Vertolety Rossii" (Helicopters of Russia) holding and "Agusta Westland" (subsidiary structures of "Rostekh" and "Finmeccanica")) is estimated to manufacture middle-sized multi-purpose helicopters AW 189. They are expected to be used in the Arctic. Thus, Italy virtually broke the ice in Russian-Italian relations, thereby having realized objectives of its EU presidency, and reiterated its intentions on restoration of relations with Russia.

From my view point, at present the principal objective of two countries implies a search for new prospective spheres of bilateral cooperation in the Arctic. For the Italian diplomacy Russia's experience in implementing its strategy in the region, its stance on the urgent issues of Arctic cooperation and accumulated knowledge is beneficial. For Russia cooperation with Italy may feature a unique opportunity for applying Italy's technologies for full-scale development of its fossil fuels and installation of the

¹⁴ Italy's Ambassador to Russia: normalization of relations with Moscow – Rome's priority in the EU presidency. URL: <http://www.interfax.ru/383869>.

¹⁵ Gianotti, A. 'Italy loves Russia while looking back to the EU', Official site of the Gorchakov' fund, published on 30 March 2016. URL: <http://gorchakovfund.ru/news/18646/>

infrastructure in the region. Therefore, ample opportunities are opening up for Russia and Italy to promote cooperation at the business, as well as research-and-development levels across a wide scale of cooperation directions that are equally beneficial for both parties.

Conclusion

To conclude, firstly, a new direction is formed in Italian diplomacy – the Arctic diplomacy. At this stage, the primary objective of Italy's policy in the Arctic boils down to gain a foothold in the Arctic Council and region in general through active engagement of Italy in multilateral and bilateral Arctic cooperation. Italy considers the EU must have an increasingly important role in the Arctic cooperation.

Secondly, Italy takes a holistic approach to its Arctic diplomacy, successfully combining the rich history and available modern scientific and technological potentials.

Thirdly, by nowadays Italy has vividly articulated its certain interests in the Arctic region. In the short term Italy will develop its Arctic diplomacy mainly through scientific and economic cooperation. Originally, its attention to the Arctic was focused mainly on the scientific and exploratory activity that did allow Italy to attain necessary foundations for its involvement in the Arctic affairs. Eventually, economic interests became prevalent in its Arctic policy, whereby the Italian business is set on playing an active role, which is seeking new focal areas in the North.

Fourthly, Italy is looking for a key mediating role in the Arctic affairs: between small European countries and the great Arctic powers, between Russia and the West, between the EU and Arctic countries.

Fifthly, Italy can play a key role in improving relations between the EU and Russia. The interest in deepening the partnership with Russia in the Arctic was voiced by Federica Mogherini, during the presentation of the new EU Arctic strategy in April 2016. In terms of sanctions such cooperation is possible only in the sphere of transports and in this context, projects of “Finmeccanica” and “Fincantieri” are considered to be crucial. However, it is important to take into account the position of Russia, which is not likely to cooperate with the EU in the Arctic while sanctions remain in force, giving preference to bilateral cooperation with some European countries.

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