
Russia sees Arctic as key to security

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MOSCOW (RIA Novosti) - Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said Wednesday that the use of Arctic resources was central to the country's energy security.

"According to estimates by experts, the Arctic shelf may have about one-fourth of the world's shelf hydrocarbon reserves, and the use of these reserves is a guarantee of Russia's overall energy security," the president said at a Russian Security Council session.

He also said Russia's competitiveness on global markets depended on Arctic resources, stressing the need to adopt a law establishing the frontiers of Russia's Arctic zone.

"We need a firm normative-legal base regulating Russia's activity in the Arctic. First of all the federal law on the southern border of Russia's arctic zone should be completed and adopted," he said.

Medvedev also said that Russia would next look to establish "the external frontier of the continental shelf."

"This is a very important task," he said.

The Russian leader said about 20% of Russia's GDP and 22% of national exports were produced in the Arctic.

"Our first and main task is to turn the Arctic into Russia's resource base of the 21st century," Medvedev said, adding that a whole number of problems, including the protection of Russia's national interests in the region, needed to be solved.

Medvedev also said a priority task for Russia was the modernization of the transport infrastructure in the north of the country.

He said that "roads and air links" had deteriorated in the post-Soviet period, adding that the absence of "modern river and sea ports," plus the "dilapidation of the fleet, including icebreakers," was "a tangible obstacle in implementing the rich investment potential of the Arctic."

Medvedev criticized the irrational use of resources in Russia's northern regions.

The secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, said Wednesday the government was to draft the fundamentals of Russian state policy in the Arctic by December 1.

"We should defend our interests, but we understand that Canada, Norway, Denmark and the U.S., as well as Russia, will defend their interests," Patrushev said.

Russia has undertaken two Arctic expeditions - to the Mendeleev underwater chain in 2005 and to the Lomonosov ridge last summer - to back Russian claims to the region.

The area is believed to contain vast oil and gas reserves and other mineral riches, likely to become accessible due to man-made global warming.

Russia said earlier it would submit documentary evidence to the UN of the external boundaries of the Russian Federation's territorial shelf in 2009.

Under international law, the five Arctic Circle countries - the U.S., Canada, Denmark, Norway and Russia - each currently have a 322-kilometer (200-mile) economic zone in the Arctic Ocean.
