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MAIN INTERESTS OF SPAIN IN THE ARCTIC REGION

***Abstract.** This paper analyzes the main interests of Spain and the role it is left to play in the Arctic region. Although, Spain does not obtain an official arctic strategy, it was mentioned in the Guidelines for Spanish Polar Strategy that the Arctic region has become one of the country's national interests. The government of Spain is also deeply concerned about the problem of climate change and how it affects economic and social aspects of life. Nevertheless, although it is clear now that Spain does have interests in the region, they do not seem very concrete. That is why it is important to determine them in the framework of this paper.*

***Keywords:** Spain, non-arctic state, climate change, arctic policy.*

The problem of climate change has been the topic of scientific interest for a very long time and remains a controversial issue when it comes to domestic and foreign politics of countries. It is clear now that climate change does not only affect discussions about the environment, but also touches such spheres as politics, economics, energy and international cooperation. Moreover, the Arctic has become a strategic region where interests of the world's most developed countries collide. Being the center of everyone's attention, the Arctic is rich in natural resources, such as gas and petroleum, fish, flora and fauna. More and more countries show interest towards this region and Spain is no exception. Though Spain takes part in the exploring of the Arctic as a part of the European Union and various international organizations, it is interesting to understand its own interests and how they evolve.

Despite the geographical remoteness, the Spanish justify their claims towards the Arctic by citing their historical legacy. Since the discovering of America, Spain was the maritime nation that opened new oceans and new continents for the rest of the world. Their contribution to the exploring the Antarctic and Northway Passage search expeditions on vessels Cabrillo (1542), Gali (1582) and Vizcaino(1596-1602) left a significant impact in history and in the minds of the Spanish people [1].

Nevertheless, Spain's modern day interest in the Arctic evoked rather late in comparison to other European countries, in years 2006-2007. During that time, Madrid started to involve more institutes and incorporate more scientific missions towards the exploring of the Arctic. Thanks to numerous research missions carried out by Spanish scientists, in 2006 Spain became one of the 12 observer countries in the Arctic council, in 2009 became a

member of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) and in 2011 the Spanish government appointed the first Ambassador in charge of Arctic Affairs [2, p. 24-25]. Since then the understanding of the Arctic has taken a different turn: from a remote region in the far north, the Arctic has transformed into the object of political interest.

The legislative part of Spain's presence in the Arctic is based on the 1982 United Nations convention on the Law of the Sea, allowing the state to perform various activities in the special economic zone and the high waters [3, p. 2].

The organ coordinating Spain's polar activities is called The Spanish Polar Committee. Spanish Navy administers the National Polar Data Centers and different research institutes – all of the abovementioned structures enable Spain to develop an internationally renowned arctic approach [4].

As it was stated above, Spain's interests in the Arctic do not seem concrete. This statement has a point, considering that Spain does not obtain an official polar strategy as other countries do, for example, Italy. However, Spain does have interests in the Arctic, mainly concerning scientific research, navigation routes and the fishery.

It is known, that Spain does not have a long history of scientific missions in the Arctic, but in the past few decades, their numbers increased for a reason. Spain has for a long time been committed to the European and international standards for preserving the environment, such as Kyoto Protocol and European directives on climate change. The government of Spain showed the concern about the climate situation, especially the melting of glaciers and the rise of the sea level in the Arctic. This is one of the reasons why Spain activated its Arctic policy – to study the conditions and changes, occurring in the region.

Despite fighting climate change, Spain also has strategic interests in the Arctic. It is widely known, that Spain is highly dependent on imported energy resources from the Middle Eastern countries. It is also known that the Arctic possesses 25% of the world's resources of gas, 27, 6 % are not yet discovered [3, p. 4-5]. The energetic potential is what captures the attention of the Spanish government the most. Yet it does not have access to these resources according to the law, but as long as Spain is dependent on the imported energy material from the arctic countries. Moreover, Spanish company "Repsol" is one of the world's 500 biggest transnational companies and the world's largest gas and oil importer [5, p. 76]. That is why it is important to enhance the security of supply, especially if the energy products come from countries with unstable political situation. Moreover, Gas Natural Fenosa and Gazprom's deal over Yamal SPG one more time proves the importance of the research base in the arctic, taking into account that Spain's energy security depends on it. Scientific research in the Polar Regions is especially vital because of the global processes and

discoveries that happen there and their huge influence on the rest of the planet.

As it was stated above, scientific interest of the Spanish researches date back to the 16th century. Since then more and more expeditions have been taken to the polar region, especially the Antarctic. Today Spain possesses a permanent research base in the Antarctic, but still the arctic route is being developed as well by Spanish scientists and also as a part of international research groups with their European colleagues. The scientific programs are based on the platforms of Spanish universities, such as Polytechnic University of Madrid, University of Barcelona etc., and are of a non-governmental character. In most cases, such programs are financed by the EU and usually involve a bigger group of participants from various countries. This is the consequence of the distance, separating the areas and the need for specific infrastructure, complex logistics and long-term financing that scientific research requires.

In the Arctic Spain does not have town land infrastructure, despite two water vessels – the Hesperides and Las Palmas, that is why it is important to maintain relations with other countries in order to get access to equipment in different areas and to promote research in the Arctic waters through oceanographic campaigns [6]. Among the arctic countries, Spain mostly interacts with Canada, the USA, Norway and Iceland, where they have common interest in the scientific field and in the field of tourism. The autonomous University of Madrid develops scientific programs along with University of Laval in Canada and Center of Nordic studies in Quebec. All of these research centers participate in various international programs, such as Joint Operation for Ultra Low Emission Shipping (JOILT), Svalbard Integrated Earth Observing System (SIEOS). Spain is also subjected to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) and the ACCESS (Arctic Climate Change, Economy and Society), which is aimed at evaluating the Arctic Climate Change scenarios and their impact on specific economic sectors and human activities over the next decades [7]. Each of this program pursues similar goals, such as observing of the consequences of climate change of economic and social life, the processes in the Arctic and how the influence the economic situation in the high waters and changes in biodiversity.

To sum up, it became clear that the scientific research is one of the main, if not the most important topic when it comes to Spain's interest in the Arctic. Taking into account the geographical remoteness and lack of proper financial initiative from the government, Spanish research initiatives should be taken seriously.

Only 5% of Spanish fisheries is happening in the Arctic. Nevertheless, the fishing industry traditionally remains one of the most important economic objectives in the Arctic, especially for the small arctic

countries. Spain is the largest fishing nation in the European Union and the interests of Spain in the fishing industry matters are modulated by the fact that since the accession of Spain to the European Communities, were attributed to the institutions of the competences in the field. The Common Fisheries Policy of the European Union regulates the fishery of Spain in the Arctic. The so-called "Northern Agreements", concluded by the EU with Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Islands, manage fisheries in the North Sea and the North East Atlantic.

Spanish interests focused on the exploitation of living resources of the Arctic are or may be susceptible to clash with interests the two great Arctic States - Canada and Norway.

A potential conflict between Canada and Spain appeared on the surface when Canada adopted authoritarian measures concerning the coastal waters. Canada was planning to extend its continental shelf and tried to claim sovereign rights over the existing resources. It is also hard to forget the turbot war between two countries.

Spanish interests against Norwegian interests in the Svalbard: Spain has been fishing habitually in the waters of the archipelago Svalbard for fundamental exploitation of cod. The Svalbard regime is regulated by the Treaty of Paris of 1920, which establishes Norwegian sovereignty over the archipelago, but recognizes other contracting parties the right to equally access the natural resources. This has resulted in the possibility for Norway to take measures for the conservation and management of marine resources; however, among the competences that Norway enjoys, there was no evidence of the right to inspect any other ships nor the right to arrest for the violation of an alleged fishing infraction. Since 2006, ten arrests of Spanish fishing vessels that worked in the Arctic have happened. The tense situation has reached a meeting point in January 2013, since the establishment of the memorandum of understanding between the respective authorities to monitor each other in the development of the fishing activities they carry out in the Arctic fishing grounds [8, p. 26]

Spain's interest in the Arctic navigation routes seems obvious. As it was previously stated above, since the 16th century Spanish explorers searched for famous North West Passage. Nowadays Spanish interests are more focused on the North East Passage because of the geographical proximity and its obvious trade benefits. This way comprises a series of routes that allow reducing the distance between Europe and Asia by 40%.

In the field of international cooperation Spain develops different routes of interconnection. As it was previously mentioned, educational ties are very developed, whether in the energy sector, Spain cooperates with Norway and Russia, securing safe energy supply. Generally, Spain mostly interacts with EU and NATO partners. When it comes to Russia, the current cooperation is strictly limited and is only motivated by the means of economic benefits, although Spanish authorities did not express their

dissatisfaction with Russia's actions, Spanish scientists haven't numerous times stated the ecological risks of exploring the carbon in the Far North.

It is obvious that nowadays every developed country is interested in the Arctic region. The Arctic is very rich with natural resources and every country would like to have a hold of them. Luckily or unfortunately, only a limited number of countries have full access to these gifts of nature. Many countries are "looking" North and Spain is one of them. This paper determined Spain's main interests in the Arctic and described the role that the government plays there. Spain is definitely moving in the direction of the EU when it comes to the Arctic, mostly putting emphasis on research purposes. What matters, is that Spain does have interests in the region, but without a proper national strategy, they will continue to be seen as diffuse and will not be taken seriously.

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