

## Arctic Conference: 'Territory of Dialogue'

The Russian Geographical Society (RGS), with the support of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, hosted the Second International Arctic Forum at the Northern Federal University in Arkhangelsk, Russia, Sept. 22-23, bringing together 450 scientists, politicians, and reporters from Russia, the United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, China, Japan, and many other countries, to discuss the development of this rich, but largely untapped region of our planet.

Participation in the conference led Alaska Lt. Gov. Mead Treadwell to issue a call in the *Anchorage Daily News*, for the his state, and the U.S. as a whole, to wake up to the opportunities offered by Arctic development, and both cooperate and compete with Russia in this endeavor.

This year's conference, held in the ancient capital of the Russian North, focused on the urgency of creating an Arctic transportation system, including the development of commercial and research navigation, sea and air transportation terminals and corridors, polar aviation, and cargo and passenger trans-polar and cross-polar transportation, with all the safety issues involved. The Russian organizers argued that without a transportation infrastructure, the Arctic cannot be developed, and development of this region is the guarantee of Russia's prosperity.

In his address to the conference, Putin emphasized that Russia is determined to turn the Northern Sea Route, "the shortest route between Europe's largest markets and the Asia-Pacific region," into "an international transport artery that will rival traditional trade lanes in service fees, security, and quality. States and private companies that choose the Arctic trade routes will undoubtedly reap economic advantages."

RGS president Sergei Shoigu, who also heads the federal Emergencies Ministry, reported that specific recommendations were adopted following the discussions. Russia will establish an Academy of Sciences Arctic Research Center in the Arkhangelsk Region, "to give a fresh boost to science in the North," and Russia will expand its icebreaker fleet, the government committing to build three nuclear-powered, and three diesel-electric icebreakers for use on the Northern Sea Route, with the first of the three nuclear vessels to be completed by 2015-16.

The title of the conference, "Arctic: Territory of Dialogue," points to the new mode of international relations required for mankind's survival. As Vladimir Kotlyakov, honorary president of the RSG, put it: "Cooperation is a must in the Arctic region. It has large reserves which should be used, but it is impossible to explore and develop them independently. On the other hand, there are political territorial disputes around the Arctic region, which can be resolved only through negotiations. If they are resolved unilaterally, new conflicts will emerge."