



The New Chinese Silk Road May Run Through the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: The extension of the Finnish railroad system into Norway to the town and port of Kirkenes, as the accompanying excerpted article from China's *Xinhua* reports, would provide a trade route for Chinese goods to the Baltic Sea and into Central and Eastern Europe. This would allow the Chinese to use the Northeast Passage running north of the Russian coast and save 40 percent of the current travel distance and 20 percent of energy costs. It would also bypass the major ports of Marseilles, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg and create a new trade hub in the Baltic Sea and, ultimately, it would promote China's major interest and influence in the Arctic region. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Envisioning a new port on the Barents Sea coast and a railway that goes all the way southward to the Baltic Sea, Norway’s Arctic town of Kirkenes sets its sight on a major European hub on a Polar Silk Road with a link to China. Finland and Norway announced on ... 9 March their plans to explore building an Arctic railway between Finland’s northern city of Rovaniemi and Norway’s ice-free port of Kirkenes. This agreement came after Norway announced plans to develop a new harbor and terminal areas near Kirkenes, a town in the Sor-Varanger municipality in Norway’s northeastern county of Finnmark.”

Source: Liang Youchang and Zhang Shuhui, “Norway’s Arctic town envisions Gateway on the Polar Silk Road with link To China,” *Xinhua*, 10 March 2018. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/10/c_137029993.htm

Rune Rafaelsen, mayor of the Sor-Varanger municipality, told Xinhua that “This project with a railway connected to the Belt and Road Initiative through the Northern Sea Route and the Arctic strategy of China fits very well into all the plan for the huge ‘Barents Harbor’. Regarding future logistic transport in the Arctic, you are dependent on having a good railroad that could reach Europe fast and Kirkenes is the first (Western) port when you come from China.”

According to a study by the Finnish and Norwegian governments, the 520-km railway between Rovaniemi and Kirkenes would cost about 2.9 billion euros (3.6 billion U.S. dollars) and open in 2030. It will form part of the proposed Arctic Corridor, which envisions that cargo from Asia would be offloaded in Kirkenes and sent southward by railway to Finland, the Baltic states and the rest of Europe. Local planners in Kirkenes have been lobbying for the Norwegian town of Barents, 15 kilometers west of the border with Russia, as the perfect site for a major hub linking the Arctic shipping route and the Arctic Corridor.

“The vision for the Arctic Railway is to be able to offer an environment-friendly and faster transport alternative for goods between Northeast Asia and Northern Europe via Finland by utilization of the Northern Sea Route and development of Kirkenes as a hub port,” according to a Norwegian report published in January. The report titled ‘An Arctic Railway Vision’ was the result of work between the development company Sor-Varanger Utvikling, the Kirkenes Business Park and the Finnmark County Council. The voyage could be reduced by 40 percent using the Northern Sea Route, also known as the Northeast Passage, when compared to the current route through the Suez Canal between Northern Europe and Northeast Asia.... It would result in a 20 percent reduction in fuel consumption....



Kirkenes Harbour, 2010.

Source: By Mathis Heibert, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/52/Kirkenes_Harbour.jpg, CC BY 2.0.