

Russia 'One Step Closer' to Year-Round Sailing in Melting Arctic

By [The Barents Observer](#)

January 19, 2021



Alexander Ryumin / TASS

A powerful Russian icebreaker has crossed the Northern Sea Route for the first time at this time of year as ice coverage shrinks in the rapidly melting Arctic.

The liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker Christophe de Margerie made it through the Chukchi Sea and into the Bering Strait on Saturday, Jan. 16, after 10 days in thick sea ice.

“It is a historical day for the development of the Northern Sea Route and national shipping,” Transport Minister Vitaly Saveliev [said](#) Monday.

He said the voyage, which shows the shipping route can be used for an extra one to two months every year, is “a step toward year-round commercial shipments on the route.”

Christophe de Margerie captain Sergei Gen told Saveliev via video call Monday that the voyage from the Sabetta LNG terminal in northwest Siberia’s Yamal to the Bering Strait took a total of

10 days and 21 hours.

The distance was 2,474 nautical miles, about 65% of which was sailed astern, or backwards. The average speed was 9.5 knots and there was no need for external icebreaking assistance, Gen said.

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The Christophe de Margerie set sail from Sabetta to the Chinese port of Dalian on Jan. 5. Similarly, another icebreaker, the Nikolai Yevgenov departed from the same LNG terminal the next day and made it into the Bering Strait on Sunday.

At the same time, the gas tanker Nikolai Zubov sailed in the opposite direction from Dalian and arrived in Sabetta on Saturday.

All the carriers are part of the fleet of 15 vessels that serve the Yamal LNG project. They can all carry up to 70,000 tons of liquified natural gas, and all have ice class Arc7, which enables them to autonomously break through up to 2.1 meters of sea ice.

The fleet of LNG carriers are instrumental in Russia's ambitious plan for the Northern Sea Route. In 2020, [a total of 32.97 million tons of goods](#) was shipped on the Northern Sea Route, up 1.5 million tons from 2019.

By 2024, the Kremlin intends to boost volumes on the Northern Sea Route to 80 million tons, and to 130 million tons by 2035.

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