

Serbia could explore and mine the best quality coal in the world and other mineral resources in the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, if it applies as a successor to the precious and forgotten international agreement signed by the Kingdom of SHS after the Great War.

That agreement allows the member states a special free regime of exploitation and research of significant natural resources of Svalbard, whose area is almost as large as the whole of Europe, writes Novosti.

- It is interesting that the Kingdom of SHS acceded to the Treaty on July 6, 1925, and that to this day no successor state of the former Yugoslavia has made a statement that it continues to exercise its rights and respect the obligations arising from the Treaty concluded by the predecessor state - points out Dr. Duško Dimitrijević, scientific advisor at the Institute for International Politics and Economy.

This document was inadvertently pointed out by the campaign that EU hawks have raised in recent days over Russian coal mines in the subpolar archipelago, which is also known as Spitzbergen, after its largest island. The natural treasures of Svalbard have been protected by the subpolar climate for millennia. Until now, only the USSR, and then the Russian Federation, had the technology, manpower and ships to exploit and transport the famous local coal from the permafrost. Global warming has facilitated research and exploitation and "melted" some "frozen" ambitions.

- Until 1871, when Norway asserted a territorial claim, this archipelago was considered a "no man's land", and interest in this area grew sharply at the end of the 19th century when significant reserves of coal and other minerals were discovered, as well as due to fishing - explains Dr. Dimitrijevic.

- Great Britain, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the USA claimed these islands until the outbreak of the First World War. During the Paris Peace Conference, a special mixed commission drew up a draft of the Svalbard Treaty, which recognized Norway's sovereign rights over the archipelago, and at the same time established a special international regime that, since 1925, enables all contracting parties to engage in economic activities, i.e. exploration and exploitation of natural resources.

How tempting these riches are is evidenced by the list of treaty signatories from all continents.

- The Svalbard Treaty has a total of 46 member states that have acceded to it or ratified it: Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Australia, United Kingdom, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Korea, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, USA, Venezuela. The depositaries of the Agreement are France and Norway -

says Dr. Dimitrijević.

Despite the great interest, only the Russians have shown the strength to dig in this harsh terrain from the 30s of the last century until today. Their high-quality coal mine, which according to experts is close to the calorific value of coke, is still working, despite the anti-Russian hysteria. However, the EU sanctions have made it very difficult for the supply and life of around 300 residents of the town of Barentsburg, where the Russian Arctic mission, coal mine and consulate are located.

- It is the highest quality coal of enormous caloric value, which has a wide range of specific uses, from smelters to the chemical industry - says geologist Predrag Mijatović, deputy director of the Geological Institute of Serbia.

- For the sake of illustration, we could not use that coal directly in our thermal power plants because it would literally melt them. In the age of the world energy crisis, coal from Svalbard is only increasing in value. The news that there is an old contract from the time of the SHS Kingdom under which Serbia could explore and exploit coal and other mineral resources in the Norwegian archipelago is more than interesting.

By "excavating" the fate of the old agreement of the Kingdom of SHS, "Novosti" went into unexplored Serbian archival spaces, which may hide more useful agreements.

- One of our most serious state problems is a huge lack of timeliness, which is indicated by the Treaty on Svalbard, about which I am receiving information for the first time from you - says respected legal expert Dr. Milan Parivodić, former Minister for Economic Relations with Foreign Countries.

- He is very interesting and I believe that it is necessary for Serbia to register as a successor as soon as possible. It would be necessary to systematically comb through all our archives and determine if there are other similar agreements. I assume that they exist, because this contract also testifies that in 1925 the state was led by educated and far-sighted people. Experts believe that the validity of the agreement is questionable today, given the passage of time and the changed circumstances that led to the name changes and the termination of the predecessor states: Kingdom of SHS, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, DFJ, FNRJ, SFRJ, FRY.

- The issue of its succession by the successor states after the disintegration or dissolution of the SFRY is relevant in accordance with international legal rules and principles - emphasized Dr. Dimitrijević.

After the Second World War, the "other Yugoslavia" accepted the rights and obligations from multilateral treaties in which the Kingdom of SHS or the Kingdom of Yugoslavia appeared as a signatory, but the opinions of the depositaries of the Treaty on Svalbard were divided during the Yugoslav crisis. France still treated the former Yugoslavia as a contracting party, while Norway considered that this was not acceptable and that a solution should be found with the agreement of all parties to the Treaty.

- Due to the ambiguities that have arisen regarding the continuity of validity of the Treaty,

the documentation of which should be in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we are of the opinion that for the Republic of Serbia, as the legal successor of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and one of the successors of the SFR Yugoslavia, a more correct approach would be to give its state status the contracting parties are regulated by making a declaration of succession, which confirms the continued validity of the Treaty on Svalbard in relation to it, or by making a declaration of accession. A similar practice has already been applied during the inheritance of multilateral international agreements of the former SFRY whose depository was the Secretary General of the UN, whereby the contractual status of the then FR Yugoslavia in relation to international contractual obligations created before April 27, 1992, was permanently regulated - concludes Dr. Dimitrijević.

Arctic Treasury

Interest in the Svalbard archipelago and the Barents Sea that surrounds it has grown rapidly with global warming, which has facilitated geological exploration and led to the discovery of new sources of oil.

- During 2010, Russia and Norway concluded a comprehensive agreement in Murmansk on delimitation and cooperation in the Barents Sea - says Dr. Dimitrijević. - The solution to the border problem enabled the start of research and exploitation of new energy deposits on an area of about 110,000 square kilometers.

Navigation experts say that the distance of Svalbard, which can only be reached by boat, would not be a problem if Serbia owned the former fleet of Belgrade's "Beoplov". It had ships with the largest carrying capacity in the former SFRY, which, among other things, delivered ore from Latin America to the Smederevo ironworks. These ships were, officially, during the international sanctions of the 1990s, seized in the name of unpaid expenses to the foreign ports where they were connected, Blic writes.