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Publication | 31.10.2007

Exchange of views with representatives from different NGOs on climate change, nuclear power plants, nuclear waste and Sochi 2014 Olympics

Minutes of session 2 - 29 November 2007 p.m.

Participants: Rebecca Harms (Vice President of Greens in the EP), Svyatoslav Zabelin (International Social Ecological Union), Vladimir Slivyak (Group Ecodefense), Yevgeny Shvarts (WWF Russia), Alexander Nikitin (Bellona Russia and Green Russia), Roman Yushkov (Leader of the Group Green Ecumeen, Perm).

Harms. We will try to get better knowledge of situation on NGOs working on Environment in Russia, what they think of Russian climate policies, energy strategies. We will learn about the negative impact of energy resource production in Russia. In the second part we will learn on the nuclear problems in Russia. It is a bit strange that there are only men on this table. My impression is that there is more freedom for environmental NGOs than for humanitarian and social ones – is this true?

Nikitin: It is difficult to understand the situation for those outside of Russia. What is going on in Russia in regards to NGOs? Just occasionally our foundation has had problems. Our office in St Petersburg was checked for two months by inspectors. In the course of inspections we got in touch with other organisations also inspected. These developments are quite worrisome. We still have questions to ask the inspection service, and we are receiving strange responses and we are not sure what is happening. Also, if an organisation is funded by foreign grants then it is the first to be inspected and examined and as a result we are now being challenged in courts because of two grants we received (one from the Netherlands). One of the grants was for a project called a School for Environmental Journalists. The court said what we did was self advertisement and so not in the limits of law. What is the danger? The fact is that for all the money that we receive first we have to pay taxes, then penalties and these are economic tools which are used in dealing with certain organisations. When these things happen organisations adapt. We now have a lot of registered organisations, many large ones but also small ones – and there are a lot of small organisations that cannot survive the inspections. You need to hire lawyers, you have to pay courts, penalties, etc. Small organisations cannot survive such inspections. About 80 percent of registered organisations will have to stop their activities in the future. And NGOs cannot function without external funding but if they get that funding then they get economic penalties. This is what we are observing from inside.

Harms. Does it help NGOs when the general public shows an interest in ecological issues and the problem of waste?

Nikitin. In my opinion you are right. Russian citizens are interested in environmental issues only if the problem is right next door to them. So i.e. people from St Petersburg don't care what is happening in

Chelyabinsk, and vice versa, but there are active minorities which organise themselves in smaller groups and carry out different actions.

Harms. So the Russian citizens aren't better or worse than people elsewhere in Europe?

Zabelin. Let me give you an example: last December in Turkmenistan someone from my organisation was arrested and immediately two days later 280 organisations acted to support them. This was a huge moral support so support does exist.

Harms. Is there a Russian climate strategy? And if not what is lacking?

Shvarts. I will be pragmatic. People are aware of the problem but because of a lack of appropriate humanitarian background and lack of scientific knowledge people don't know why these problems are bad. People think that a warmer climate would be better. It is a wrong perception. As to the Kyoto protocol implementation formally the government adopted the full package. Just some regulations are missing but they will be adopted very soon. The registration for joint implementation projects has started. The companies which are interested in investment and increasing efficiency Gazprom, etc- have no capacity to do so. Chubais blamed the officials of the Ministry of Economic Development that this is good money for the government. Russian business is not very motivated. But we have to say that the documents made by the government are not something made for Gazprom but for all governments.As regards energy strategy bureaucrats are formalising this and it is problem. It is not being developed by businessman but by bureaucrats who live by Weimar Syndrome. It uses the principle of maximizing sales of gas to Europe and instead using coal at home. We have to understand that Russia and the EU are not the entire world. There is also China. And selling natural gas to China will reduce the Chinese coal burning emissions. And in order to reduce in real terms the energy consumption growth we have to address the energy inefficiencies in the economy. Mainly energy consumption in the housing sector. The political debate will be focused on this sector. In my mind the problem is not hopeless and there are some areas in which the state impact is required as people cannot pay. But in Moscow new buildings are getting meters and counters. But for pensioners who live in old houses this is impossible.

When the energy generation will be separated from distribution and when there are a lot of generation companies a lot will depend on Western companies in Russian sector. They will have to put more serious efforts on environmental situation.

Questions. **Hautala**: How much do the citizens of Russia enjoy environmental rights to participate in decision making and to get information? (i.e. Aarhus Convention access to justice) How do these rights look at the moment? **Cramer**: Can you organise roundtables and make petitions, etc. how does that work? **Harms**: In West Europe climate protection is the dominant topic at the moment is this also the case in Russia or is it less important?

Nikitin: As for environmental rights Russia has not ratified Aarhus Convention and so we cannot have access to courts yet. But at same time Russia has a range of its own laws and these are not that bad. We believe that these laws are getting worse now. Amendments are being adopted, which deteriorate those laws, environmental protection laws, etc. But with the existing laws we can protect our rights. On the ground one can go to courts but it would be tactical rather than strategic. Demonstrations and collecting signatures is a difficult and very expensive process and there are fairly few organisations in Russia that can organise or fund such activities. In addition, especially if it is against certain power plants, it can only be done by organisations that are in proximity of those power plants.

Zabelin. Green areas are decreasing. Parks and gardens are destroyed for new housing. People need more money to hire a lawyer or hand out leaflets.

Shvarts. All objective surveys regarding attitudes on ecology show that it is on 4 or 5th place of importance. Opinion polls show that in most regions there are not climate doubters but people that do not know what to do. Leaders in Russia believe that Europe has cornered itself with ecology and is limiting its economy and that it why it does not have great growth rates. Climate awareness has increased but now it has to be connected to energy use and efficiency, the burning of coal.

Harms. A lot of money comes into Russia from gas and energy sales. That means that Russia itself would need to change its infrastructure and make it more efficient because Russian resources will not last forever. But what problems do ecological NGOs face in Perm an oil rich region?

Yushkov. There is a disastrous environmental protection situation. 80 percent of infrastructure goes back to Soviet times and so it is inefficient, and there are many spills, which are local ecological calamities. New pipelines were laid in the 90s, stemming from total corruption of our bureaucrats, through parks, very close to citizens and that is disastrous. In other villages, there have been oil leaks which then have made people sick and have made people to turn to different sources for drinking water. The problem is also Europe as a buyer of Russian natural resources. We would like you to look yourself at what you are doing in Europe.

Staes. You are a movement, do you have any links to politicians, to people in the Dumas (lower, national, federal, etc.)?

Yushkov. Of course we have been trying to cooperate with various political forces. We have sought to seek alliances. Sometimes we succeed, with Yabloko for example. Oil is a sacred cow so other political parties will not touch it.

Nikitin. In the beginning we could always address to Yabloko, now we are lacking that. Other parties each party before elections would come up with ecological programmes but afterwards it is all forgotten. Yabloko of course has a green section in it but other parties do not have a green 'wing'. Other parties are not tackling the problems.

Shvarts. First we should appreciate that big business in Russia has changed its attitude over the last couple of years. Example, first LUKOIl send me threat letters, now they ask me how we can find a compromise.

Slivyak. We launched major campaign against oil production in Kurin area that is facing same situation as in Perm but we cannot get in contact with politicians, or media access. When LUKOIl said it would build oil fields in Baltic Sea we went to Lithuania and ask what they think about this and they said they didn't have a position because they received no information about it. And so because we obtained the information and transferred it to the Lithuanian authorities they then were able to do something about it. So Europe has a part to play itself.

Hautala. As regards the North Stream project Russia has not ratified ESPO convention about projects which have environmental boundary impact. What could we do to invite the Russian Federation and make them take up their international obligations?

Kallenbach. If I were you I would be rather depressed than optimistic. We hear about the legislative discrepancies, we hear about LUKOil's immense power. Do you think you have really an influence over the people in Russia? Are you a serious power in Russia?

Horacek. Can you comment on the Yukos problem from the perspective of the NGOs?

Zabelin. The middle class is growing and so we are growing. I am optimistic of our future. It is difficult to work with public authorities but we can work with the business community. But the largest business

companies report on environmental impact both to WWF and Russian NGOs on a voluntary basis. They realise that economically it is beneficial to be transparent and that helps us.

Nikitin. I am not supportive of idea that business is supporting us. Nobody really reports, from time to time they send a piece of good will with some kind of report on something. With us, they don't send us anything, we take them to court, and afterwards they send us something, so that is how we get information. As to Yukos we are all aware that it is a purely political problem. Authorities said to business: do not get involved in politics. And examples of Khodorkovsky and Lebedev show what will happen if you get involved with politics.

Shvarts. I am an optimist. Russian government is a big child learning to play with toys. How many European companies said something about environmental problems in the Caspian sea? None, because they benefit from the energy from that region.

Russian Atomic Policy Now

Harms: Can you tell us something of what happened in Mayak?

Slivyak. Today it is the 50th anniversary (1957) when the spent fuel storage exploded and 50 million radiations got emitted in the atmosphere. Hours after, many square kms of land were contaminated. Another problem of Mayak is that not all people in the villages were removed. So many people were left in villages there. More than 10 thousand were evacuated but some keep living on contaminated areas. High cancer rates now, but officials do not want to make an official link between radiation and cancer. On that ground they do not provide reimbursements, despite the fact that those reimbursements are negligible, about 300 Rubles a month, which is less than 10 Euros. Most dangerous is that they process spent fuel – which is the most dangers nuclear energy process. No safe procedures have been completely found yet. They are accidence-prone and a couple of months ago another leak occurred. Russian officials have no clear cut policies on what needs to be done with waste that occurred in Mayak. They are working on the processes of spent fuel, which is also produced by dismantling nuclear submarines that the international community is paying for. Two years ago the environment protection agency had a bit of a success stories itself. Our organisations told them to resettle people from those villages and in the most serious case they followed our advice. Other things we told them was to redirect water and get different water supply. One problem was that they resettled people but to villages where the radiation was also present. Why have they done that often? Because officials have their own construction firms and it is profitable for them to construct in these areas.

Russian plans to expand the civil nuclear programme

Nikitin. They want the nuclear sector to become a kind of business. So in Russia you can sell oil and gas and nuclear plants. This is all done by a team of Kiriyenko. Goskorporatsiya – Rosatom, which has two structures: civil & weapon.

And Russia also wants to build floating nuclear islands so that they can sell it to China and India. Basically this is what is going on with this state corporation (Goskorporatsiya) called Rosatom.

Hautala. What about the corruption in Rosatom?

Nikitin: I am not a prosecutor so I don't know all about it.

Staes. What can we do to help? Tell us.

Harms. There is not only Rosatom working in the nuclear sector. There is also Siemens and Areva

working in nuclear complex in Russia. So if we work out strategies we also need to focus on which companies from the EU are involved directly or indirectly in the Russian nuclear complex. There is no true answer. Challenge the private European firms that provide loans to Areva or Siemens for them to build nuclear plants in Russia.

Lunacek. What is the attitude of the Russian population to nuclear energy and nuclear waste? Are accidents such as at Mayak, well known in Russia?

Slivyak. All public polls show that the population (more than 90%) are against imports of nuclear wastes into Russia and this despite Rosatom's large scale propaganda campaign, which is running now for already 7 years. This campaign said that it is good to do imports of nuclear waste because they make money and that money could then be used for the environment. As far as reactors are concerned the situation is more diverse. There are different polls with different results. If you ask people whether they would like new nuclear power plants in their region more than 70 percent say no. Particularly this poll was organised in autumn 2006. We are now organising a new poll in areas where new nuclear power plants are planned and we try to get new statistics. I think again about 75 percent or so will say no.

Sochi and the Olympics

Zabelin: 2014 Olympics in Sochi. Russian officials changed boundaries of the national park so that Sochi could be a prospective candidate.

Harms. But there are not only environmental problems, also social conflicts.

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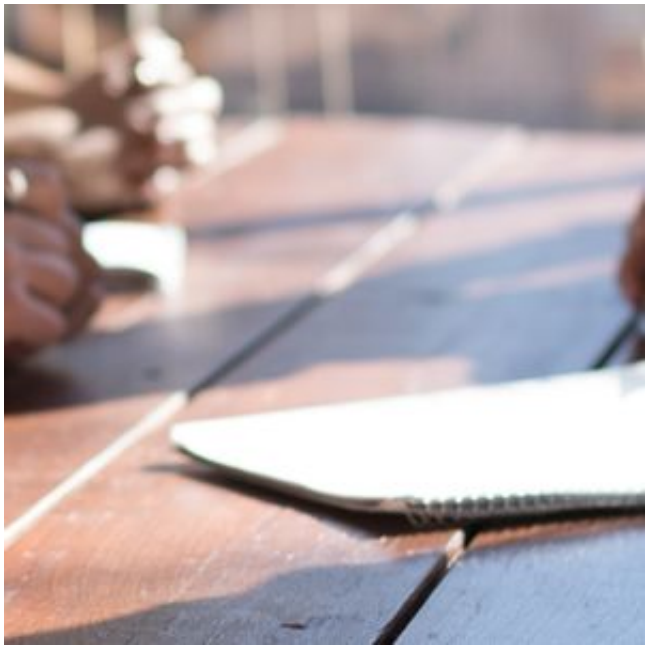

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