



EU-RUSSIA CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ГРАЖДАНСКИЙ ФОРУМ ЕС-РОССИЯ

‘Russian North Is Not a Dump!’ – Stop the Construction Works in Shies and the Pressure on Activists

Address by the Working Group “Environment” of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

For a year, residents of the Arkhangelsk Region and the neighbouring Republic of Komi have been constantly fighting for their rights and for the future of their children – in the absence of open and credible information, under conditions of pressure, manipulation with the public opinion and the intentional silencing of the issue of utter importance to them.

We might lose the Russian North because of the authorities’ decision to turn the Arkhangelsk Region into a landfill for the Moscow garbage. The unwillingness of the Moscow government to create a civilised waste management system led to the decision to dispose their own garbage in other regions. Already now, this might be transported to the regions of Kaluga, Kostroma, Vladimir and Yaroslavl¹.

The decision to organise the biggest European landfill with the beautiful title “Ecological and Technological Park ‘Shies’” in the South of the Arkhangelsk Region, near the Shies train station, was made in 2018². There is evidence for massive violations of the law at the project implementation stage. The construction works have been carried out without any project documentation, an environmental assessment, a proper geological research or a public consultation. However, numerous trees have been felled already, workers have been on the site day and night, infrastructure facilities have been built. At the same time, the authorities deny the fact of construction by calling the infrastructure facilities a ‘preparatory work’.

At the initial stage, the authorities were talking of the construction of a waste recycling plant. Later it turned out that this would be an ordinary landfill. Tons of unsorted garbage would be ground and packed in Moscow and then taken hundreds of kilometers away, to the Shies station, where it would be buried for decades. The planned area of the landfill is 3,000 hectares; the volume of the garbage to be stored is 2.3 million tons per year. The construction of the

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.7x7-journal.ru/articles/2018/04/20/protest-against-the-moscow-waste-in-yaroslavl>

² For the latest information on the issue, please go to <https://7x7-journal.ru/articles/2019/06/04/arkhangelsk-court-has-fined-activist-drevarkh-prosvetlyonnyi-for-participation-in-the-anti-garbage-demonstration-on-april-7> and other related articles on the same website

landfill has been executed on a wetland. The Shies marshes feed the rivers Shies and Upper Lupia. Those flow into Vychegda, a tributary of the Northern Dvina River, which, in turn, flows into the White Sea.

The investors and the governments of Moscow and the Arkhangelsk Region refer to a European experience and technology. Such partners as EuRec (Germany), Flexus Balasystem (Sweden) and Satarem (Switzerland) have been named among their partners. According to the authorities, these companies would supply equipment and provide expertise. Apart from that, the project lobbyists tell about an interest of the Norwegians for the project and refer to the Finnish experience. However, the disposal of compressed bales is not an ordinary practice in European countries. In some cases, wrapping compressed waste into a plastic cover is used for transportation over long distances and a short-term (up to one year) storage: For instance, it is the case with the residual waste from the Island of Gotland (Sweden). All this reveals another attempt of the authorities to deceive residents of the region, as well as a desire of some companies to sell their “dirty” technology.

For months, the residents have been trying to protect their right to a favourable environment. They demanded compliance with the legislation and the discontinuation of the illegal construction works. On 7 April 2019, thousands of people gathered at the central square of Arkhangelsk for the first time, even though the authorities had again permitted a rally outside of the city centre. Since that day, a permanent protest has been going on there. People have been on watch all the time and have been expecting the moment, when the construction works are put on hold. Protest actions have been happening in neighbouring regions, too: On 2 June, more than five thousand people gathered in Syktyvkar, the capital of the Republic of Komi. The residents of Kotlas, Moscow, Severodvinsk and Yaroslavl have also been protesting against this barbaric waste disposal solution.

Instead of a respectful and fair attitude, the authorities and private security companies have put residents under constant pressure. Several dozens of activists were subjected to legal violations by law enforcement units. Withdrawals of equipment, arrests, fines have been happening continuously. The hardest pressure have been experienced by those, who have been on a round-the-clock watch at the construction site. Since January 2019, the watch has been there to document violations during the construction works. Throughout these months, the watch members representing the local community have been working hard to acquire information on the construction. In March 2019, the first cases of a physical pressure took place.

In the night from 14 to 15 March, a workers’ power shovel intentionally destroyed a module building of the people on watch; and one person inside was injured. However, actions of the workers did not have any legal consequences. What is more, the locals themselves were blamed for the incident. On 20 April, police officers sealed a module building with a human inside, who fell ill and needed an urgent transportation to a clinic. On 10 May, representatives of a private security company patrolling the construction site beat up local residents, who tried to prevent fuel unloading from the trucks; one of the activists had a concussion of brain as a result, others had proofs of physical harm on their bodies. On 4 June, when activists tried to prevent the repeated construction of an illegal fence around the construction site, a special police force (OMON) forcibly removed them from the site. As of today, dozens of administrative cases against Shies defenders have been opened, four others might face criminal charges.

We demand that the governments of Moscow and the Arkhangelsk Region immediately stop all construction works at the landfill near the Shies train station, as its operation would threaten the environmental situation and biodiversity in the Russian North. We also expect from the government of the Russian Federation that it will bring the Federal Law No. 89-FZ "On Industrial and Consumer Waste" of 24 June 1998 (with corresponding amendments) in compliance with European standards and strictly control the implementation of the law, that it will not allow for the disposal of the waste from one region in another, and it will bring the perpetrators to justice. Furthermore, we demand that the pressure on activists stopped and their safety were guaranteed. Finally, we call on international companies dealing with waste disposal to show their responsible attitude towards our common environment and not to take part in dubious projects in the Russian Federation, which also might harm the neighbouring states.

26 June 2019

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The EU-Russia Civil Society Forum was established in 2011 by non-governmental organisations as a permanent common platform. At the moment, 174 NGOs from Russia and the European Union are members or supporters of the Forum. It aims at development of cooperation of civil society organisations from Russia and EU and greater participation of NGOs in the EU-Russia dialogue. The Forum has been actively involved, inter alia, in the questions of facilitation of visa regime, development of civic participation, protection of the environment and human rights, dealing with history and civic education.

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