

Good Domestic Efforts, Underestimated Threat

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Here Kokorin evaluates the climate change impact sustained by Russia, the likely future, and the steps the government is taking to adapt and mitigate the effects of climate change domestically and in cooperation with international partners.



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Courtesy of Alexey Kokorin

As a northern country, Russia has experienced, so far, a very modest climate change impact. Local but temporary positive climate change impacts have occurred in agriculture and the opening up of northern shipping routes. Negative impacts are melting permafrost and flooding in susceptible areas, public health threats from the spread of diseases, winter transportation in the north, and the impact on wildlife, particularly the polar bear. Currently there seems to be sort of a balance, and people still think that an overwhelming negative impact may become a reality only in the second half of the 21st century, not in the near future. The minister of Natural Resources and Ecology announced, in April 2009, that current Russian losses from emergencies created by weather events cost the country 1 to 2 billion dollars per year.

Top Russian officials still do not recognize greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction as a great value itself, although the level of recognition is gradually growing. They do recognize now the anthropogenic causes and *global threat* of climate change, but they do not yet see that danger is here now in Russia. It is rather critical already and will be more so after 2010.

On the other hand, officials recognize the concerns and the climate change-related losses suffered by other countries. As an important international power, Russian leadership wants to share in shouldering the responsibilities in dealing with the global climate situation along with other nations. Evidently, the Russian government is looking at the competitiveness of the Russian economy in the context of new carbon emissions rules, taxes, and measures that may be adopted internationally in negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to replace the Kyoto Protocol.

Russia has set some important climate-friendly goals:

- Reduce energy intensity of GDP by 40 percent by 2020
- Achieve associated gas utilization by 95 percent by 2014-2016
- Increase share of renewable sources from 0.9 to 4.5 percent (excluding large hydro) by 2020

Growth of GHG emissions by 1 to 2 percent per year is expected, but these measures can slow down GHG growth and provide a stable level of emissions by about 2020. The level could be 25 to 30 percent below 1990 levels or only 5 to 10 percent above 2007 levels.

Other climate-friendly steps include studies and reporting, education, and preparations for adaptation measures in the most vulnerable

regions, for example, in permafrost and flood-risk areas.

- Russian Assessment Report, similar to Volumes 1 and 2 of the IPCC 4AR, has been prepared and provides a basis for recognition of the threat. But economic Volume 3 has not been started, and the question about scale of losses in comparison with

cost of adaptation and GHG reduction is still open.

- Russian Climate Doctrine is ready to be signed by the president, proclaiming mitigation, adaptation, and contribution to global efforts as key tasks. It is not yet supported by plans and implementation but has great value to increase public awareness by rolling out educational efforts.

In international fora of the UNFCCC, G8, and Major Economies Forum, Russia displays its goodwill to work together toward a new climate change agreement

at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen in December 2009. At the recent G8 meeting in Italy, Russia agreed to a 2-degree C global goal, as defined by the G8, meaning that global temperature increase should be limited to 2

degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) in comparison with the preindustrial era, and to a very ambitious goal of 80 percent emissions reduction by 2050 for developed countries as a whole, but only a 50 percent reduction for Russia itself.

Negative impacts are melting permafrost and flooding in susceptible areas, public health threats from the spread of diseases, winter transportation in the north, and the impact on wildlife, particularly the polar bear.



A polar bear rests on a small ice floe in the Arctic Ocean north of Franz Josef Land, Russia.

BURDEN SHARING

Russia emphasizes the *equity of burden sharing*, with special attention to the largest GHG emitters. The general view of Russian officials and the public is the same: Even countries with relatively smaller GDP per capita should determine equal levels of commitments, which has to be fixed in an international agreement together with Russian commitments.

Without a positive reply from all of the largest global emitters, Russia announced only very weak

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Flooding of the Neva River in downtown St. Petersburg, Russia, is an unusual occurrence in mid-winter: Flooding and permafrost melt have increased in recent years.

mid-term goals by 2020: 10 to 15 percent below 1990 levels or 20 to 25 percent above the current levels (in percentage points of 1990). It is a very disappointing decision, which I hope may be corrected if the largest GHG emitters adopt more ambitious goals.

Burden sharing includes *financial contributions*, and after the recent Major Economies Forum, President Medvedev stated that Russia is ready to support the Multilateral Fund proposed by Mexico. In the Russian

case, the source of funding will be mainly the state budget, which allocates funding for foreign aid.

Russia is still out of the *global carbon market* and does not take part in joint implementation or emissions trading mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol. But there are many projects and ideas that have the support of potential foreign carbon investors. Russian business would like to see carbon trading more seriously pursued. The law on joint implementation participation was signed two years ago, but no project has been implemented to date. Although in June 2009 the prime minister issued an order to accelerate and simplify procedures, there is no clear progress yet. The main reason is that the government does not consider joint implementation or emissions trading important because the potential scale of these mechanisms is negligible for the state budget.

In a new climate agreement, Russia would like to keep joint implementation in balance with the Clean Development Mechanism outlined by the UNFCCC. Officials appear open to domestic emissions trading systems in a sector or sectors of the economy, but this is considered a national concern, which should not be under international agreement.

Domestically, Russia is going to implement climate-friendly steps even though the full implications and value of climate protection measures may not be fully acknowledged or understood. Internationally, Russia certainly would like to be a “good guy” in global climate efforts and take a leadership role, but the realization of the given goodwill requires more effort in developing and applying effective remedies to meet the very real challenge of climate change. ■

The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.