

MAIN PROBLEMS OF THE BALTIC REGION

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The struggle against petroleum pollution:

About 20 years ago, more precisely in 1987, less than 20 million tons of petroleum products passed through all Russian ports on the Gulf of Finland; in 2001 this figure was already 50 million tons, in 2003 – 77 million tons per year. According to one of the schemes for development of the port of Primorsk in the Leningrad Region, they envisage the possibility of bringing this capacity up to 110 million tons of petroleum and petroleum products per year. With the inevitable increase of the volume of maritime transport, the government of St. Petersburg and the government of the Leningrad Region would have to pay more attention to the safety of maritime transportation corridors in the Baltic Sea. For this purpose, satellite monitoring of the maritime and coastal environment was arranged in the Russian zone of the Baltic Sea. At the 5th international forum «Day of the Baltic Sea», held in Petersburg, among other important subjects, a round-table session was organized on «Ways to guarantee the safety of the transport of petroleum products in the Baltic Sea». Its participants, representatives of various sectors of society, noted that «the growth in the number of arrivals of vessels of the tanker fleet» increases the risk of vessel disasters and the accidental spills of petroleum products, especially in conditions of drifting ice. At that time, a recommendation was adopted at the forum for administrative structures and commercial organizations connected with the transport of ecologically dangerous cargoes in the waters of the Baltic Sea. The substance of the recommendation was the need to immediately develop the system of monitoring the environmental condition of the sea, including the satellite monitoring of port complexes, the coastal zones adjacent to them, and shipping routes.

Russia's transport activity in Baltic waters also alarms the European Union. In April 2004 the International Maritime Organization adopted a decision to give the Baltic Sea the status of a «Particularly Sensitive Sea Area». In these conditions, the activity of the third sector -- which independently monitors compliance with environmental law in the construction and functioning of structures of the petroleum, petroleum refining, and «petroleum transportation» branches, as well as the entire spectrum of the national economy that works with hydrocarbon fuel -- is not only appropriate, but also extraordinarily important for the country, in spite of a multitude of directly contradictory assessments of this activity on the part of very authoritative people, including the Russian president, Vladimir Putin. The activism of environmental NGOs in this field is varied, but always subject to sharp criticism. Many NGOs work on different aspects of this problem: Bellona, WWF, IA Sustainable Development, Green World, Eco-Defence. There are also ecological activists who work alone, for example, Aleksandr Sutyagin, the superior expert in this field.

Nuclear security:

In our region, lying on the Baltic Sea, the aging reactors of the Leningrad Atomic Station represent the most serious problem. The blocks installed in Sosnovy Bor were named «Chernobylski» by the people. In fact these are RBMK-1000 reactors, like those at the Chernobyl Atomic Station. And although enormous sums of (mostly Western) money have been invested in systems to upgrade their safety, the moral and physical aging of the blocks, in combination with the loss of faith that there is any truth in the information about what happens at the station, makes LAES (Leningrad Atomic Energy Station) an ecologically dangerous structure, in the opinion of the residents of the metropolis. In November 2005 the regional government listened to proposals on replacing the LAES, which was coming to the end of its working life, calling their meeting something more concrete – the Northwest AES. However, as before, the public knows very little about the new project. Another pain suffered by the Northwest, also located in Sosnovy Bor – 60 kilometres from Petersburg – is the Radon special combine, where radioactive wastes are stored. Its capacity is practically exhausted. And the development of the atomic branch in the region is under a large question mark, at least for this one reason. Both structures, and also the Ekomet-S plant in Sosnovy Bor, built in violation of the requirements of environmental preservation law, is in the zone which is permanently watched by Petersburg's environmentalist NGOs: Bellona, Greenpeace, Green World, and the Association of Environmental Journalists of St. Petersburg keep track of what happens in Sosnovy Bor.