

THE INTERACTION OF BRANCHES OF POWER IN THE TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA

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Summary

In the third millennium protection of the environment and transition to sustainable development are considered high priority goals by individual nations and the world community at large. Elaboration of conceptual principles of sustainable development, the creation of mechanisms for their implementation, and environmental education of the wider public, who should share the goals of national environmental policy and consciously contribute to its everyday realization, require purposeful cooperation of the executive and legislative branches of power. Such cooperation is a major prerequisite for effective participation in programs and projects of sustainable development of all state institutions, private businesses, public organizations, and ordinary citizens. This article traces the roots and the making of environmental policy in medieval monarchical Russia, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. The interactions of different branches of power in their efforts to make the transition to sustainable development in Russia a steady and irreversible process are influenced by several factors. Some of these are not directly related to the state of the environment or to the ecological awareness of the wider public, but stem from the course of political and economic reforms in Russia. The main foci of the article are the structure and efficiency of the bodies of executive power responsible for elaboration and implementation of national environmental policy, and on standing environmental legislation and the prospects of its future improvement. The constitutional principles of the national environmental policy of the Russian Federation are compared with similar principles of the Constitution of the USSR (1977). One of the most important features of the environmental policy of the Russian Federation is its orientation towards transition to sustainable development. The concept

of transition to sustainable development in the Russian Federation was officially proclaimed by presidential decree in 1996, and has been further improved since then. The final part of the article examines the goals and mechanisms of environmental education in Russia, which should provide for adequate public awareness of sustainable development and active participation in environmental programs, projects and other activities.

1. Introduction

Like other forms of life, the human race depends on the biosphere and physical environment of the Earth. Positive and realistic planning is needed to balance human needs against the environment's potential for meeting those needs. To survive on the planet, human beings should look for adequate means of sustaining the stable and continuing existence of an environment suitable for life in its widest biological diversity. Yet numerous statements by authoritative scientists have provided overwhelming evidence that the affluent way in which humankind now lives and thinks is driving its vulnerable life-supporting biosphere to irreversible destruction. Most of the "passengers on Spaceship Earth," in the third millennium of its long journey in time, have until now found it difficult to put aside ambiguity in their relationship with the environment. The double role of humans in the biosphere—as a participant of the system of life and an active exploiter of environmental resources—is the essence of this paradox. An important landmark in the process of learning of how to make relations between the biosphere and society steady and sustainable was the development in the 1970s of the concept of steady state society, which set limits for the population and physical wealth of a nation (or society) as environmental factors in sociopolitical development.

As far back as 1972, the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, called for comprehensive analysis of the interaction of human society and the global environment of the planet:

"A point has been reached in history when we must shape our actions throughout the world to a more prudent care for their environmental consequences. Through ignorance or indifference we can do massive and irreversible harm to the earthly environment on which our life and well-being depend. Conversely, through fuller knowledge and wiser action, humankind achieves for itself and for posterity a better life in an environment more in keeping with human needs and hopes. There are broad vistas for the enhancement of environmental quality and the creation of a good life. What is needed is an enthusiastic but calm state of mind and intense but orderly work. For the purpose of attaining freedom in the world of nature, man must use knowledge to build, in collaboration with nature, a better environment. To defend and improve the human environment for present and future generations has become an imperative goal for mankind—a goal to be pursued together with, and in harmony with, the established and fundamental goals of peace and of world-wide economic and social development."

It is due to progress in learning and incorporation of ecological values into politics that the concept of sustainable development was put on the agenda of the world community. Irrespective of the ideological dogmas which govern the everyday socioeconomic and

political activity of nations belonging to different political systems, every nation is dependent on the finite resources of the biosphere. Political priorities and economic capabilities affect the methods of utilization of natural resources, and in the long run determine the prospects of survival of the future generations of any nation on Earth. This circumstance makes it necessary for the government of any nation to develop and implement appropriate national policy involving transition to sustainable development. Such policy should incorporate the most urgent tasks and missions associated with the protection and rational use of natural resources available on the territory of a particular nation, and at the same time set priorities for that nation's participation in international efforts aimed at sustaining the quality and reproduction of the most biological valuable resources. No matter how innovative and non-traditional the concept of sustainable development may seem to an outside observer, in the environmental policy of individual nations, this concept has both deep historical roots, primarily of a philosophical and sociocultural nature, and pragmatic orientations which serve as guidelines for the everyday activities of the nation's population, motivated among other factors by ecological consciousness.

2. The Making of Environmental Policy in Russia

2.1. Historical origins

The first legislative documents which may be qualified as environmental protection acts are mentioned in Russian historical chronicles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. All of them in this or that form regulated hunting. As far back as the thirteenth century Prince Vladimir of Volynsk proclaimed the rules of a future preserve—the Belovezhskaya Putsch National Park—which existed in the European part of the Soviet Union until its dissolution. Until the beginning of the seventeenth century, the monarchical government of Russia set practically no limitation on the use of domestic natural resources. Before Tsar Peter I assumed actual control in 1689, there existed limitations only on hunting. Peter I enacted the first laws protecting wildlife, and also made the first efforts to protect the quality of water in the Neva river and other water sources in Russia. Although these legislative documents reflected the outlook of the monarchical circles that ruled Russia during that period, the legislation nevertheless was in conformity with the moral and ethical inclinations of nature of the majority of the people, which were in accord with the cultural and religious traditions of the past, which venerated nature and endowed it with supernatural qualities.

The ecological outlook embodied in the creative works of Russian philosophers, writers and artists, may be considered a cultural and ethical foundation not only of an attitude of care towards nature, but also of the instigation of the first public actions in defense of natural resources. The writings of Alexander Pushkin, Alexander Herzen, Feodor Dostoyevsky, Leo Tolstoy and Anton Chekhov organically combine a love of nature with a compassion for human beings. Emotional discourses on the beauty of nature by the outstanding representatives of Russian society of the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries are inseparable from calls for cautious treatment of natural resources, for the liberation of the popular masses, and for the establishment of favorable conditions for realizing their creative abilities.

As far back as the nineteenth century, the Moscow Society of Explorers of Nature, the Petersburg and Riga Societies of Naturalists, the Russian Society for Advancement of Natural Science, Anthropology and Ethnography, and the Russian Geographical Society, among others, took educational and other actions in defense of nature and pointed to the necessity of establishing natural reserves. The beginning of the twentieth century in Russia was marked by the establishment of specialized environmental protection societies which carried out education of the population in the spirit of a conservational attitude towards the natural environment.

For centuries the Russian Orthodox Church played a significant role in the spiritual and cultural development of Russian society. The environmental crisis in the middle of the twentieth century was carefully analyzed by the Russian Orthodox Church in the framework of Christian anthropology and natural philosophy. According to such interpretations, one of the main reasons for the global environmental crisis was forceful separation of human beings from nature, as well as violation by humans of natural laws, which prescribed for them an appropriate place in the biosphere. The Russian Orthodox Church claims that human beings enter this world the way they enter church, to pray in front of God. Since humans are at the same time material and spiritual beings, they must combine spirituality and everyday labor activities, thus combining both God and the world in which they live.

2.2. Conceptual Norms of Socialist Resource Utilization

“Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws.” These words from Frederick Engels’ “Dialectics of Nature” were one of the ideological dogmas which determined the principles of the socialist way of exploitation and development of natural resources in the Soviet Union.

The Soviet concept of natural resource utilization also contains a number of basic theses formulated and developed by Lenin. It was as a result of Lenin’s initiative and personal participation that more than 90 laws, decrees and other normative legislative documents aimed at the protection of nature and the cautious handling of natural resources, were adopted in the first years of the USSR. A respectful relation to nature and scientifically grounded principles of rational utilization of biosphere resources were directly linked in communist ideology not only with building the material foundation of a new society, but also with the ideals of a world without war, and of equal and mutually beneficial relations with all other states in an integrated world economy. The protection and regeneration of the Earth’s natural resources were by this token recognized as common problems of all humankind. Indeed, their solution will be possible only under conditions of constructive interstate cooperation in political, socioeconomic, humanitarian, cultural and other areas—all in the name of safeguarding peace as the primary pre-requisite for the further progress of civilization.

Within the Soviet concept of nature utilization the following basic components can be singled out:

- a state-wide approach to the land and all its riches, reflecting the vital interests of all the peoples and providing for the elimination of private land ownership,
- an attitude towards nature as the eternal source of human welfare, with the utilization of natural resources on the basis of comprehensive scientific research into the laws of nature,
- compulsory planning and realization, in the course of resource utilization, of measures of protection and regeneration of natural resources for the benefit of both present and future generations,
- observance in relation to natural resources of the principle of continuous optimization of utilization, taking forceful measures to reduce anthropogenic impacts on the environment and to establish harmonious relations between society, technology and nature,
- a “systems approach” to natural resource utilization, taking into account the complex requirements of all aspects of the production of goods and services, as well as of the interests of society concerning public health, and the interests of every individual concerning comprehensive personal development,
- continuous environmental education and training of all members of society, taking into account cultural traditions as well the latest scientific achievements, and
- a long-term goal of transforming the technospheric component of the biosphere of today into a noospheric component—into a sphere of reason and common sense, which excludes non-harmonious relations with the natural environment

These components may in some aspects influence the everyday activity of the branches of power of the Russian Federation connected with the implementation of national environmental policy and the program of transition to sustainable development.

Soviet society considered the utilization of natural resources to be a special kind of socioeconomic activity, one that is designed to meet the material and spiritual needs of all members of society, to protect and regenerate the resources of nature, and also to ensure harmonious balance between economic development, biological stability and the aesthetic integrity of the environment. The utilization of natural resources is concentrated in the following three directions:

- the production of goods and services,
- international cooperation, and
- education and raising of the cultural level of all members of society.

The multinational community of the peoples of the USSR called upon all the peoples of the Earth to elaborate by joint efforts a common long-term strategy of sustainable creative activity for the benefit of the living and future generations of humankind. Such outlooks may, as elements of “genetic memory,” influence the approaches of contemporary Russian decision-makers to the elaboration and implementation of a national strategy of transition to sustainable development.

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Biographical Sketch

Grigori Sergeevitch Khozin was born in 1933 in Novosibirsk, Russia. He was educated at the Institute of Foreign Languages, Moscow, 1956, and School of Journalism, Moscow State University (post-graduate course, 1963).

Academic achievements: Degrees from Institute of US and Canadian Studies (History), and Academy of Science, USSR; Dissertation 1971, US Space Program: Government Policy Implications (1957-1970); Doctor of History. Institute of US and Canadian Studies. Academy of Science, USSR; Dissertation 1985, Global Problems and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical Concepts, Mechanisms of Implementation, Trends in Foreign Policy (1960s-1980s).

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