

## ERGEBNISSE VON TA-PROJEKTEN

### Public Participation in the Debate and Decision Making in Energy Policy: A Russian View

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The article summarizes some preliminary results of the research project “Public Participation in Environmentally and Socially Oriented Technological Policy: Philosophical Foundations and Institutional Frameworks”.<sup>2</sup> Arguments here are focused on energy policy in Russia. The main objective of the total project is to analyze normative, institutional and political problems of public involvement in technology policy-making by a comparison of experiences in Russia and EU countries. In the context of global energy problems and the corresponding debate the author identifies the chance that processes of social learning become ‘transnational’. But on the other hand, the Russian experience shows the trend, that governmental actors try to control nongovernmental organizations to a greater extent – a trend which is not productive for the establishment of bottom-up approaches.

#### 1 Introduction

In 2006 for the first time Russia chaired G8, the elite club of industrialized countries. It was energy security that was proclaimed as the main topic of the Russian presidency. Undoubtedly, the security of energy supply is one of the most urgent problems for the global economy. As far as Russia is concerned, the energy problem is extremely important for both the economic and political development of Russia. It is also important to keep in mind that in Russia discussions on energy issues have a rather long history. In addition and foremost, it is with the problem of energy that the first experience of public involvement in decision-making processes in the field of technological and environmental policy is connected. Both the basic changes in the decision-making process in technological and environmental policy, and the influence of the civil society on this process during the last two dec-

ades can be traced back on the example of discussions on energy.

It is worth noting that in Russia, due to historical reasons, this decision-making process still differs essentially from that in the European Union. The acceptance-oriented model can be considered as a standard model because it prevails at present over other models of technologically and environmentally oriented policy-making in the democratic developed countries. The strong and weak sides of the acceptance-oriented model have been described in detail (Bechmann et al. 1994; Grunwald 2000); the convincing alternative allowing to overcome the disadvantages of acceptance-oriented decisions is also offered by Armin Grunwald (2000). In the case of Russia there is a more complicated and contradictory dynamics of decision-making whose starting point was the decision-making process under conditions of a totalitarian regime, where human beings, nature, science, technology etc. are only means to achieve the political purposes of a ruling party, elite or leader. Analyzing this decision-making dynamics within the framework of rational choice theory would be at least one-sided. In my opinion, the tradition of political culture research taking into account the socio-cultural foundations of the political process is more fruitful (Inglehart 1988). Socio-cultural conditions represent the orienting framework for the participation of groups and actors in the decision-making process. Applying this approach together with concrete historical analysis allows to understand why during 20 years after the Chernobyl accident the influence of civil society on decision-making processes on questions of technical and ecological policy has been so unstable.

#### 2 The Chernobyl Syndrome

The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1986, became a turning point in the international discussion on the prospects of nuclear energy development. For the Soviet Union the Chernobyl accident had far-reaching economic, social psychological and political consequences. Wide public discussion of the reasons and circumstances of the Chernobyl accident coincided with the growth of civil activity and the appearance of political opposition in the former USSR. Gorbachev’s radical opponents noted a system interrelation of the accident

of 26<sup>th</sup> April and the mechanism of decision-making within the framework of a totalitarian system. 'Systems interrelation' means here that these opponents interpreted the highly centralized (top-down) model of decision-making in the field of nuclear energy in the Soviet Union and its totalitarian origin as an important precondition of the Chernobyl accident.

In connection with the Chernobyl accident the phenomenon of eco-nationalism came into being. It touched upon almost all republics of the former USSR (Dawson 1996). Its appearance was caused by the system crisis of the Soviet Union, the synergy of aggravated environmental problems, the rise of national movements and the impossibility to rule using the former "command-administrative methods". Eco-nationalism was one of the symptoms and at the same time a new impulse for the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the gaining of independence of its former united republics. For example, in Lithuania the attention of the public interested in environmental problems was primarily concentrated on the operation of the nuclear power plant in Ignalina. Leaders of environmentalist and nationalist movements pointed out that the recurrence of a nuclear power plant accident, comparable Chernobyl, would mean a national catastrophe for Lithuania. But it is worth noting that after Lithuania gained actual and legal independence in September 1991, the Ignalina nuclear power plant continued to operate, providing steady power supply for the country as well as electric power for export. The Lithuanian government had to return to the question of closing the Ignalina nuclear power plant only in connection with the accession of Lithuania to the European Union.

In other parts of the Soviet Union only a few environmentalist groups were ready to have close organizational and political interaction with national movements in their republics. But still the environmental demands connected with the overcoming of consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe, the termination of the construction of new reactors of the Chernobyl type and the achievement of real ecological publicity was actually supported by all the people affiliated with different political groups. No serious political force in the Russian Federation, Byelorussia and the Ukraine, from supporters of independ-

ence to adherents of integrity of the united state, could ignore these demands.

It is worth noting that the connection of national and ecological movements contributed to the fact that ecological problems became the political priorities of the central united government in the last years of the USSR. At that time the necessity of comprehensive and anticipatory forecasts of economic, social, and ecological consequences of the development and wide industrial use of new technologies as well as the assessment of potential alternatives began to be considered as issue of the day. In particular, the USSR government made decisions aiming at the creation of a system of complex expert examination in the field of nuclear power engineering (Gorbachev 1995). However, the realization of these assignments and proposals did not result in the creation of organizations for Technology or Environmental Impact Assessment. In fact, on the threshold of the 1990s, the whole process of long-term decision-making in science and technology was blocked due to uncertainty concerning the future of both the political regime and the economic system.

The fall of single-party regimes and ideological dictate, the development of political pluralism, privatisation and diversification of economic activity etc. have led to a substantial transformation of the shape and contents of the policy-making process. Within the framework of the general process of political transformation the transition from the Soviet type model of "technocratic paternalism" to acceptance-oriented models is under way. This transition however was characterized by structural weakness which only led to the formation of separate, isolated institutional mechanisms of civil participation in corresponding decision-making processes. In particular, on the threshold of 1980 to 1990 there was a fast growth of non-governmental organizations, many of which were ecologically oriented and opposed the further development of nuclear power engineering. In the middle of the 1990s, these structures of the civil society achieved a certain success: The adoption of the legislation on Environmental Impact Assessment in 1995 should be mentioned here first of all.

The first Russian experience of plebiscitary democracy in the field of energy policy was another success achieved by these structures. In

December 1996, a referendum was organised in the Kostroma region on the building of a nuclear power plant. The referendum was initiated by the regional environmental NGO “*In the Name of Life*” and *Greenpeace Russia*. The preparatory campaign had a strongly pronounced propagandist character on both sides – environmental NGOs and the Federal Ministry of Nuclear Energy, which managed the project. 59 percent of voters in the region went to the polls; 88 percent of them said “No” to the nuclear power plant (Yablokov 1997, p. 168). As a result the project was stopped. Nevertheless this means in the terms of social learning that the Kostroma region is at present more advanced in understanding the risks of nuclear energy or environmental problems than other Russian regions.

The case of the Kostroma referendum underpins a number of analytical conclusions. First, it casts doubt on the so-called ‘ladder of civil participation’ introduced by Sherry Arnstein (Arnstein 1969). The highest level of this ladder is the citizen control which implies plebiscitary forms of democracy. But the referendum is a very controversial instrument. A referendum itself cannot be interpreted as the “best of the bests” within the repertory of participatory democracy. Even in Switzerland with its strong tradition of cantonal or federal plebiscites, the referenda on problems such as nuclear energy and genetic technologies revealed some shortcomings – over-politicization of the problem, polarisation of viewpoints, dominance of emotions over rational argumentation, attempts of political parties burdening the discussion with additional issues etc. (Bütschi 2000). In Kostroma all these negative features of referenda revealed themselves. It is evident that such an event will not have any long-term positive effect without systematic efforts of civil society aiming at a better life and a better environment. The characteristic feature of real progress of environmental and technological policy-making is not formal bottom-up dynamics, but systematic participation of civil society based on using a broad range of instruments and procedures of decision-making.

The Kostroma referendum became the acme of public participation in decision-making in the field of energy policy, which was followed by a drastic recession of public interest in these

problems. At that time the results of Gallup polls showed a steady decrease of the level of concern regarding environmental issues. For the period of 1994 to 1998 the figures showed a decrease between ten to 20 percent for various categories of people and different regions (Mokievsky 2000). The effect of Chernobyl was exhausted. However there were also other circumstances which contributed to further changes in political decision making. The process of political decision making in the second half of the 1990s can be understood by leaving the unitary actor model. Corporative interests were in the foreground at that stage of social and political development in Russia. Domination of interests of financial groups and industrial corporations, most of which were related to the fuel and energy sector, could rather often be defined as the rule of New Russian oligarchs. As a matter of fact it emasculated the essence of democracy while retaining democratic procedures themselves. Traditional economic and social issues came up like poverty, social cleavages between the new economic elites, the governmental actors and the people with their actual concerns.

### 3 Debates on the Kyoto Protocol: Discourse Transfer

The debates on the ratification of the Kyoto protocol livened up public discussions on energy issues. These debates revealed the important phenomenon of transferring the combined discourses of science, politics and society which under the conditions of globalization have gained importance in the international institutes, multilateral agreements, and also electronic mass-media. For Russia, the problems of global warming and how to cope with it became a “borrowed” discourse. Though the Russian representatives took part in the negotiating process on problems of climate change on all stages, it was not Russia that struck the keynote of scientific, public and political debates on global warming. In Russia, the problem of global warming remained at the periphery of public interest when heated debates were conducted in Europe and the USA. But when the Bush administration refused to ratify the Kyoto protocol, its destiny fell into Russia’s hands, and the Russian government was confronted with the necessity to make decisions within the framework of a political agenda formulated on the basis of an

“alien” discourse. No wonder that under these circumstances Russian decision-makers showed practically full indifference to the ecologically motivated arguments in favour of Kyoto. Only politic-economic arguments were efficient.<sup>3</sup> The discussion about problems of climate change in Russia was promoted from outside, and it was rather top-down oriented – from decision makers and the community of experts to the civil society. On the whole, however, it was the first adequate national discussion on energy problems since the end of the 1980s. National mass-media as well as numerous parliamentary and non-governmental hearings played an important part in it. The result of the debate was paradoxical: the problems of climate change became the subject of public interest, but it was scepticism with respect to the Kyoto protocol which prevailed in public opinion. Nevertheless, the Russian decision makers decided to ratify the protocol. In outward appearance this decision seemed rather a backward step towards technocratic paternalism.

#### **4 Inventing a New Discourse: Energy Superpower**

The change of the Kremlin government on the threshold of the year 2000 resulted in the radical change of character and structure of the political process during the first term of the presidency of Vladimir Putin. The state ceased to be only one of the actors of the decision-making process alongside with financial groups and fuel and energy corporations. The real control of the state over the key energy industries was restored and the new Russian oligarchic system of decision-making was dismantled. The development of the energy sector, which comprises one-quarter of Russia’s GDP and one-third of industrial output, has furthered rather fast economic growth for the past eight years now. It is obviously caused by economic conjuncture, first of all, a steady trend of the rise in prices of energy carriers. Most likely, the steady rise of the prices of energy carriers is connected not only with the sharp growth of demand in countries such as China or India, but also with the fact that within the framework of the present-day techno-economic paradigm, the cornerstone of which is still the use of hydrocarbon fuel as the main energy source, the solution of the problem of energy security has not yet been found. Al-

though during all these years many people have discussed the problem of excessive dependence of the economic development of Russia on the export of energy carriers and have warned of the danger thereof, among the representatives of the Russian political elite the belief is growing that the epoch of cheap oil and gas has become a thing of the past. In addition, Russia has a large potential in both, nuclear and hydro-power engineering, as well as huge energy-saving potentials, which have been insufficiently used so far. This fact strengthened the political elite’s confidence in taking the dominance in the field of energy supply away from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf.

It is a geopolitical accent that dominates in this new discourse now. Both, the problems of global energy security and tactical problems of the relations with the adjoining states are actively discussed. The discussion concerning the consequences of specific projects including those of the North European gas pipeline, the Pacific oil pipeline and the development of the oil and gas complexes of East Siberia and Russia’s Far East, is under way. Another matter of discussion is energy saving. Energy-saving projects based on the use of state-of-the-art technologies, processes and equipment have a very good potential, as they will help to develop export energy resources. Oftentimes, however, this will require adaptation to the Russian environment, including price conditions and buyer/consumer specifics (Arbatov, Belova, Feygin 2006). In all these debates the participants have gradually focused their attention on the entire spectrum of technology policy options, from the introduction of routine technologies of energy efficiency in housing to the development of hydrogen power engineering.

#### **5 Also a Process of Social Learning**

Just as it was with the Kyoto protocol the debates were initiated by top policy-makers and experts closely connected with them. Today, thanks to mass media the attention of wide sections of the population is attracted to these problems. It is possible to speak of the occurrence of a feedback between public opinion, the expert community and decision-makers, as well as the formation of some basic premises of a social learning process. On the whole, it corresponds to the bottom levels of Arnstein’s

‘ladder of civil participation’. At the same time the prospects of the evolution of structures for the participation of the civil society in the decision-making process are still unclear. In the Russian context, it is connected with the wish of governmental structures to control non-governmental organizations to greater extent.

In conclusion I would like to return to the international aspect of the problem in question. If we do not take into account the obviously competing geopolitical interests of the leading world players influencing the opposite orientation of debates concerning energy security of Russia and the EU, then in fact it is possible to speak of a new forum for the international dialogue of the public, experts and politicians, which does probably involve organized interests but not the general public and their organizations in civil society. Within the framework of this dialogue there are good opportunities for the discussion of the whole spectrum of possible consequences of large energy projects and new energy technologies. On this account the process of social learning could become really transnational.

## Notes

- 1) Note about the author: Dmitry Efremenko was born in Moscow, Russia, in 1967. He studied history at the Lomonosow State University (Moscow), did postgraduate studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences and the German-Russian College at the University of Karlsruhe. His dissertation was on philosophical aspects of technology assessment. Since 2003 he works as a senior scientist at the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Main fields of scientific expertise are philosophy of technology, science and technology studies, technology assessment and information society.
- 2) The project is supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and is been over all coordinated by Gerhard Banse, Fraunhofer-Anwendungszentrum für Logistiksystemplanung und Informationssysteme (ALI), Cottbus, Germany.
- 3) Examples for arguments of this kind are given in Josephson, Efremenko (2004).

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