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Siberia's Status in Russia on Par With Russia's in the World

By Paul Goble

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VIENNA &mdash Siberia increasingly is to Russia what Russia is to the world, a supplier of raw materials that those who are consuming them take without much thought to what is happening at their source economically or ecologically, a pattern that Siberians find increasingly unacceptable, according to a leading economist in that region.

At an academic conference last week in Ulan-Ude, Viktor Suslov, the deputy director of the Institute of Economics at the Siberian Division of the Russian Academy of Sciences, called for new laws that would require Moscow to pay rent for its exploitation of Siberian resources.

About The Columnist

Paul Goble is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. Earlier, he served as vice dean for the social sciences and humanities at Audentes University in Tallinn

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Arguing that "the status of Siberia inside Russia at the present moment corresponds to the position of Russia in the world at large," Suslov said Siberia must develop "a powerful industrial sector for processing raw materials, an effective system of innovations," while not forgetting about protecting the environment.

Suslov attracted attention recently when he and his colleagues in Novosibirsk and Krasnoyarsk released a report saying "the construction of large new hydroelectric stations on the territory of Siberia hardly can be considered rational" and current projects in that area are "simply criminal."

Suslov's linking of environmental and economic concerns is increasingly common among Siberian experts and commentators, one that reflects both their anger about the current situation and their use for their own purposes of the anger that many in Moscow now feel concerning how Russia has been reduced to being a raw materials supplier to the world.

Another side of Siberian concerns about the way things are going in their region was suggested at the same conference by Arnold Tulokhonov, a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences who heads the Baikal Institute of Natural Resource Use at the Siberian Division of the Academy.

In the keynote address to the meeting, Tulokhonov compared the economic development of Siberia with that in the adjoining regions of China, noting that the situation on the Russian side of the border does not stand up well regardless of whether one looks at transportation infrastructure, population maintenance, or trade.

The academician stressed that Moscow should take into consideration the reality that "95 percent of the European part of Russia depends on the natural resources of Siberia and the Far East" and thus be willing to give more back so that the enormous part of Russia east of the Urals will not continue to suffer, especially compared with China.

And he concluded that Moscow must also take steps to ensure that the state borders between Russian and China be "converted into a means for the economic development of the border territories" and that "ecological-economic problems of these regions must be resolved only on the basis of a consideration of the mutual interests of the neighboring states."

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