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Russia Rejects Greenhouse Gas Plan Criticism

By The Moscow Times

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With its gigantic reserves of oil, gas and coal, Russia emits 2 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalent a year, making it the fourth largest producer of greenhouse gases after the United States, China and India.

Russia has rebuffed calls for a more ambitious plan to cut its carbon dioxide emissions after environmentalists branded its current pledge inadequate and backward-looking.

The world's fourth largest emitter of greenhouse gases, Russia pledged in March to keep its emissions at 25-30 percent below the level it generated in 1990, the year before the Soviet Union and its vast industrial complex collapsed.

Green groups say the pledge, made ahead of a global warming summit in Paris in December, is far too easy for Moscow to fulfill because 1990 was a time when Soviet industry was a notoriously prolific polluter whereas Russia's industrial base today is much smaller.

A group of four global climate research groups, known collectively as Climate Action Tracker, have rated Russia's pledge as "inadequate," worse than the "medium" assessment they have handed out to other big polluters such as China, the United States and the European Union.

But Russian President Vladimir Putin's top adviser on global warming dismissed such criticism during an interview on the sidelines of a Moscow meeting of the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change this week.

"It is their opinion, it does not reflect anything and is not objective," Alexander Bedritsky told Reuters, saying Russia would stick to its current plan.

"They can say whatever they want, but our commitments are based on around 70 scenarios of how the climate system will be developing."

It is unfair to compare the Kremlin's commitments to those of developed economies such as the United States or European Union member states because Russia is still an economy in transition, he added.

Russia's pledge stresses the importance of increasing energy efficiency and boosting the use of renewables.

"If the contribution of Russian forests is fully taken into account, limiting greenhouse gas emissions to 70-75 percent of 1990 levels by 2030 does not create any obstacles for social and economic development," it says.

"Tragic Pledge"

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According to Greenpeace, 85 percent of CO2 equivalent emissions in Russia come from its energy industry.

They and other green groups say Russia's current program is far too unambitious because the Soviet Union was on the brink of collapse in 1990 — the year the program is pegged to — and its greenhouse gas emissions therefore fell sharply as the country's industrial base shrank.

"This pledge is a tragedy, a catastrophe," said Vladimir Chuprov, head of Greenpeace's energy program.

"With this 25-30 percent commitment they are basically saying: 'Guys, we're staying in the 20th century with our carbon-centered technology.'"

Chuprov and fellow environmentalists want Russia, the world's biggest country by territory, to do much more, noting that its richest company — state-owned Gazprom — is the world's leading corporate emitter of greenhouse gases.

Specifically, Chuprov says Russia needs to expand its use of renewable energy and try to develop new power generating technologies or risk missing out on another technological revolution.

Currently, Russia gets 90 percent of its energy from carbon fuels such as oil, gas and coal, Chuprov said. Green groups estimate that only around 1 percent of the country's energy needs comes from renewable sources.

Green groups such as Greenpeace or the World Wildlife Fund complain that central government in Russia does not consult them enough when it comes to formulating climate change policies.

Under its existing plan, Russia would fail to meet the goal set out by the United Nations' International Panel on Climate Change to cut emissions to 50-80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, he said.

Bedritsky said Russia was already making good progress and that its greenhouse gas emissions would peak at 25 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. They will then fall or stay flat until 2030, he added.

"Our preparations for the [Paris] summit are not just good, we have achieved excellent results, announced our commitments on time up until the year 2020, and until 2025 and 2030," said Bedritsky. "We will definitely fulfill our promise."

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