

legislation has been completed in 2002. The public attention gathered by the issue in Russia may also have been something of an anomaly since national interest in nuclear issues seems generally to be waning as the memory of Chernobyl recedes. Letters to the Duma expressing concern about the environment are said in 2002 to be less than one per cent of total mail, down substantially from a few years ago. That the NGOs have a narrow social base is indicated by the fact that national-level organizations tend to be heavily financed by foreign foundations who seek among other things to provide the Russian Government with alternative sources of information. Overall, mass support is lacking for nuclear and environmental groups as long as the makings of an issue are also lacking. Although some local concern does exist (Webster, 2001), disposition is pretty well a non-issue for the Russian public at large and an item of interest to experts at present.

Whatever one's attitude towards NGOs in Russia or elsewhere, a civil society will have procedures which allow citizens to challenge the actions of the state and business in ways other than those allowed by the electoral process. Short on mass support, Russia's environmental groups also face a shortage of enabling institutions in their effort to make Minatom accountable. Use of the Federation's courts to further the public interest in health, safety, and the environment is more promising than we might think, but it requires foreign financial support. As to the regulator, it will be some time before a Russian citizens' group applies, under rigorous pleading criteria set up by GAN, and obtains the right to a public evidentiary hearing at which it can litigate a variety of safety and environmental issues raised by a MOX-related license application from Minatom – for example, environmental-impact issues connected with the risk of a successful terrorist attack at the Balakovo NPP and along the transportation routes. Where things are at today is well represented by a politician who was interviewed in Moscow: the public should be present “as observer” at hearings which are well done when 100 people meet in a room for four to five hours, principally to observe the experts. For those who are aware of the situation elsewhere, freedom of information in Russia is something of a dream. For the vast majority, the thought that ministerial action ought to be transparent seems foreign. As to the media, the fall of the last independent television station to the Federation further constrains the capacity of NGOs to make national issues of things nuclear. The focus is instead on local controversies, for example those associated with rail transport of spent fuel.

All of this is a backhanded way of saying that where civil society and an established culture of civic participation are concerned, Minatom enjoys quite a free hand. But in relation to elements of the Russian state other than the Duma and the courts, Minatom's situation is at once trouble-free and somewhat uncertain: GAN is in no real position to discipline Minatom, but the President is if he thinks it's warranted by considerations of clubworthiness.

Where the regulator is concerned, the relationship adds up to regulatory capture by industry. Certainly this is was the case with the State Committee for Environmental Protection, which now faces Minatom and Russian industry generally as a unit of the natural-resources ministry. GAN, as indicated at the outset of this study, narrowly escaped a similar formalization of the underlying realities. This is in no way to deny the value of GAN's current work in preparing state-of-the-art nuclear regulatory documents with U.S. and European Union aid. Nor should we take away from the Commission's Chairman, who seems to be regarded with respect by concerned individuals outside of government.

The question for disposition is how well the Commission's regulations will be put into effect by Russian industry and its foreign partners. Today, GAN is not really able to insist.