

nuclear power (Khripunov, 2001). New revenue could as well be derived from domestic energy sales if natural gas leads the way in being sold in Russia at world prices. Base-case disposition, it should also be noted, would provide six VVER-1000 reactors (four at the Balakovo NPP, and two in reserve at Kalinin NPP) with upgrades, adaptation for MOX use, and a service life of at least 15 years from start-up. Still, it's the spent-fuel import plan that is central to Minatom's survival without major downsizing over the next decade or two. So also is the United States. Indeed, the outlines of a deal could be there in a trade of consent rights for a Russian scale-down in Iran and other considerations including a Russian financial contribution to the Russian WGPu disposition programme. There's a question here that's worth thinking about.

If Minatom's nuclear-waste import scheme has any chance of success, why would G-7 members and others pay now into a WGPu disposition effort which the Russian Federation could itself fund? A donor's answer might be that the scheme is just that, whereas multilateral disposition is viable and should be acted upon now. By the same token, it could be in the Russian interest to close the Deal on WGPu disposition before coming across on Iran and taking in substantial additional income that could arise from the import and reprocessing of nuclear waste. Accordingly, the United States and Canada as G-8 countries with consent rights could at some point make it clear to Moscow that a portion of any income from nuclear-waste imports would have to be applied to the WGPu disposition programme.

While Minatom's bargaining position is not all that great at present, the outlook improves somewhat when we add a transnational dimension. From Senator Domenici in the West to the Japanese nuclear industry in the East, like-mindedness prevails on fast reactors and on reprocessing, if not on Russian MOX exports to Europe as well. The point here is that despite the problem of Iran, there's scope for improved commercial and intergovernmental relations with G-8 countries. Ultimately, however, Minatom will have to go along with what's offered by the United States and its associates. Nor will the offer go to Minatom. It will go instead to President Putin, who is steadily reestablishing the power of the centre in the Russian Federation.

As of early 2002, Minatom had entered a period of political uncertainty. The President, having brought the country's regions to heel, was moving to assert control over the federal ministries and key personnel, some of whom were Yeltsin-era holdovers. In December 2001, Minatom's Deputy Minister had been forced to resign. Whether or not he'd been involved, part of what happened stemmed from a scandal involving corrupt business practices over spent fuel from Bulgaria, information on which had been brought to the centre by an NGO. For a while the fate of the Minister, Aleksandr Rumyantsev, seemed also to be in question, but now he appears to be steadily consolidating his hold on the Ministry even as privatization of other state monopolies continues.

When it comes to nuclear safety and environmental protection we cannot expect anything soon from the Ministry. Rather it will come from Putin's endeavour to make Russia increasingly clubworthy. As seen in his continuing endeavour to improve the Federation's ties with the G-8 as distinct from 7+1, with the European Union, NATO, the WTO, and so on, the President seeks to have his country accepted. Irrespective of who the Russian leader is, and of what Russians think and might want to do about a war in Iraq or the U.S. missile defence programme, being a valued member of key clubs is and will continue to be viewed as essential to getting on in the world. In this regard, September 11 and the ensuing shift towards enhanced cooperation with the United States served to accentuate a preexisting tendency in Russian awareness and conduct.