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Outcry against the bill's current form

Slivyak pilloried the bill in its current iteration, telling reporters yesterday that it allows not only for liquid radioactive waste to be pumped into the ground, but green lights the construction of radioactive waste dumps against the opposition of local populations, as well as the use of taxpayers' money on radwaste storage projects.

In his Tuesday email to Bellona Web, Slivyak said that during the February meetings between environmentalists, Duma deputies and Rosatom officials over the bill, Rosatom deputy chief Yevgeny Yevstratov stated outright that if radwaste were to be put on the books of the facilities that produce it – facilities like the Mayak Chemical Combine, Tomsk's Siberian Chemical Combine or Krasnoyarsk – it would bankrupt them immediately. Yevstratov would not comment further to Bellona Web over the telephone on Thursday.

The bill is "horrifying" and "only in the political interests of the state nuclear corporation Rosatom," Slivyak told reporters at yesterday's news conference in Moscow.

Slivyak told Bellona Web in an email yesterday that Vladimir Milov, the former Russian energy minister was supportive of opposition against the bill, and appeared with the environmentalists at the news conference.

According to Slivyak, Milov said the economics of nuclear power do not add up when real costs are calculated. He also said that radioactive waste disposal is the most expensive segment of Rosatom's activities, and hence this is why Rosatom wants it to be included in the federal budget – otherwise, radwaste disposal will not be profitable for the state corporation. At present, law stipulates that nuclear enterprises are responsible for bearing the cost of waste disposal.

"The current version is irresponsible from an environmental point of view," Milov told reporters yesterday, according to news agencies.

"If the bill is passed in this version, we will refer the matter to the Constitutional Court to annul it," Milov said.

Academician and leading Russian environmentalists Alexei Yablokov added to the fire against the bill, telling reporters that, "This law is unbalanced. It protects the industry a lot but doesn't protect the people at all."

After the bill's first reading in the Duma, more than 30 environmental organisations from regions across Russia, including Bellona, participated in a protest post card drive to Duma deputies.

The postcards continue to arrive at the Duma at the rate of about a a dozen a day, Slivyak said in an earlier interview on the bill last week.

Greenpeace Russia and Ecodefence readily support the notion of a bill to regulate the management of radioactive waste in Russia, but oppose its current form for a number of reasons, saying that it "will bring disproportionately more harm than good because it is aimed at the creation of favourable economic conditions for Rostatom, often at the expense of environmental safety."

The bill

At issue is a new law on dealing with radioactive waste in

Russia. Environmentalists, while acknowledging that there are precious few laws regulating the handling of radioactive waste in Russia, say the new law could give the nuclear industry nearly unchecked license to carry on with unsafe waste disposal practices.

Environmentalists have outlined five crucial points of opposition to the bill in its current form.

The new legislation would legalise the currently illegal practice of injecting liquid radioactive waste into the ground. The bill, and the process that created it in its current form, also sets a precedent for totally ignoring public opinion regarding the sites where radioactive waste would be stored – though local populations are the ones who will be forced to live with it for thousands of years.

Underground storage facilities for liquid nuclear waste are located

close to large cities in western Siberia and risk contaminating drinking water, Yablokov said, according to Agency France Presse, citing independent experts.

Sliviyak showed yesterday's news conference a 2001 environmental impact study from the Natural Resources Ministry on the dumping of radioactive waste from the Siberian Chemical Combine into the Yeney River near Tomsk and Krasnoyarsk. The document, said Sliviyak by email, accurately depicted that radwaste is spreading into water tables – but the study allowed for further dumping.

The document concluded, wrote Sliviyak, that Tomsk should find new places from which to gather its drinking water. But Sliviyak said that during the February meetings on the bill that Rosatom had told the Duma that underground dumping of radioactive waste was 100 percent secure and that it would not spread into water table.

This was contradicted by Yablokov, a former presidential advisor to the late Boris Yeltsin. Yablokov said that as far back as a decade and a half, he was receiving reams of information about the threat of dumped radioactive wastes contaminating drinking water and flowing further in the Yenisey River.

Further, the bill in its current iteration encompasses both waste that is piling up prior to its adoption, as well as that which will build up after it is signed into law. In accordance with announcements made by the authors of the bill, the state – that is the Russia taxpayer – is responsible for this waste.

This waste includes not only what has built up before the bill's adoption and what continues to build up afterwards, but radioactive waste that has accumulated at commercial reactors. The principle contained in the bill of giving Russian nuclear power plants a clean slate will cost the Russian taxpayer billions in additional taxes.

The bill's developers' also assert while discussing new radioactive waste that will build up after the bill's adoption say that the legislation fortifies the financial responsibility of the waste's producers. However, the language of the bill contains a so-called "principle of multiple financing sources" for radioactive waste disposal. In practice, this means that one of these financing sources will sooner rather than later become the Russia federal budget. There are already dozens of outright and furtive schemes for state subsidisation of the nuclear industry.

Lastly, the current bill contains no regulation dealing with

situations of change of ownership of the radioactive waste. Essentially, this means that if over the course of a few years Rosatom decides to change its name, then it can repeat its focus on relieving itself of the responsibility of all radioactive waste that has accrued previous to that prospective name change.

Yet, Russian lawmakers said in a note to the bill that it "fully complies "with the UN Convention on the safety of spent fuel management and radioactive waste management, which has been ratified by Russia, AFP reported.

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