

GREENPEACE

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международная экологическая группа
ЭКОЗАЩИТА 

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*Bundesministerin für Umwelt, Naturschutz und nukleare Sicherheit
Ms Svenja Schulze
- personally
Stresemannstrasse 128–130
10117 Berlin*

Moscow, 20 January 2020

Uranium tails exports from Gronau to Russia

Dear Ms Schulze,

Today we are writing to you on a very urgent matter that came to light last year and which has caused a lot of concern here in Russia: shipments of German uranium tails, de-facto radioactive waste, have secretly started again from Gronau to Russia.

12 000 t of depleted uranium are currently being sent from Gronau to Novouralsk in Russia - 6000 t already in 2019. We have also heard from German media that Urenco sent even more uranium via the UK to Russia, starting in 2016. All of this comes on top of depleted uranium coming from Gronau to Russia between 1995 and 2009.

Russian ecological organizations are very disappointed about these new exports from Gronau and the initial secrecy around them. About 70 000 people have signed a petition against these transports. They see the contracts between Urenco and Techsnabexport as a way to get around the law forbidding the export of nuclear waste in Germany and the import of nuclear waste in Russia.

Our organizations also appealed to the Russian Prosecutor's Office. We see huge problems of storage of UF6 and the possible use of it in new reactors is problematic and dangerous. Rosatom claims 90% of the secondary waste generated after enrichment of the German uranium tails would be used in fast breeder reactors; now there are only two, but a lot are expected by Rosatom to be built after 2050. Such reactors contain more fissile material which can result in reaching critical mass and higher risk of nuclear explosion; they produce plutonium, which is dangerous both in terms of radiotoxicity and nuclear materials proliferation. Practice of earlier UF6 shipments from Germany to Russia was described in 2004 report by Peter Diehl for Ecodefense.¹

Rosatom recognizes that at the moment and in the long run, depleted UF6 will not be used, but will only be stored. According to Rosatom, accumulated UF6 is planned to be converted to safer chemical form

¹ In English, <https://www.laka.org/docu/boeken/pdf/6-01-2-25-12.pdf>

only by 2080². Already more than 1.2 million tons of UF6 have been accumulated in Russia. Obviously, current and future generations of Russians will have to pay for this.

In accordance with the annual reports of the Federal Environmental, Industrial and Nuclear Supervision Service of Russia, issued in 2004 and 2006-2011, depleted UF6 containers are at risk of depressurizing during their open-air storage at the enterprises in Angarsk, Seversk, Novouralsk and Zelenogorsk. These reports also indicate that depleted UF6 storage conditions do not meet the latest safety requirements. Emergency situations at these enterprises and potential emergencies, pose a threat to radiation safety. Thus, the Presidential Human Rights Council notes³ the safety issues and the risks associated with the long-term container storage of depleted UF6 in open areas of the Angarsk Electrolysis Chemical Plant JSC. Furthermore Novouralsk is a closed city where access to the wider public is limited and therefore public control or public dissent very difficult.

As the late Alexei Yablokov, a corresponding member and advisor of Russian Academy of Sciences, said: "But we see the whole process, we are against this process ... Russia is becoming more and more saturated with radioactive waste. And we don't like it, it's unacceptable, it's politically unacceptable, for that matter, not only environmentally, but also politically."⁴

At the end of the first contracts before 2009 Rosatom's management stated that no future contracts on UF6 would be made with Urenco. Then, Rosatom admitted ecological risks associated with chemical activity of UF6.⁵ But the chemical danger of UF6 is still the same, while the defluorization facility in Zelenogorsk would need more than a hundred years to convert all the UF6 accumulated in Russia into a less dangerous chemical form.

A number of groups in different cities and towns in Russia are protesting during each shipment since the imports become public in October, and our demand is an immediate stop. We appeal to you as a responsible member of the German government to become active in this matter. Russia is not the dump for German nuclear waste. Building new reactors in Russia to deal with these German uranium tails is certainly not what we would expect from the German government to condone in any way.

Regretfully, questions to Rosatom, e.g. about incidents with containers are not being answered. Urenco shareholder RWE also refused to meet Vladimir Slivyak in November. We think a contract between Urenco and Rosatom and their subsidiaries must be published, as it is a matter of public concern. We ask you to publish such a document.

We ask you as well, whether there has been any underlying agreement of some sort to cover the whole issue politically between the Urenco governments in Berlin, The Hague and London - and Moscow or Rosatom.

We kindly ask you again to meet representatives of the Russian environmental movement in February or March, as the matter is really very urgent for us.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards



Vladimir Slivyak, Ecodefense

Rashid Alimov, Greenpeace Russia

Attachments: Petition text; Greenpeace Germany Handout on UF6

² Rosatom presentations can be found in Russian here: <https://osatom.ru/news/view/120>

³ <http://www.president-sovet.ru/documents/read/664/> Recommendations of the Council after session in Irkutsk region 25-28 February 2019, in Russian

⁴ in Russian: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/1514082.html> 20 march 2009; similar assessment is given in Yablokov's books, e.g. <https://www.yabloko.ru/files/monster.pdf> pp.17-21, in Russian.

⁵ Interview of former Rosatom head Segei Kiriyyenko with Kommersant FM, in Russian: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1663158> 18 June 201