



RUSSIA'S GREEN FUTURE

The 17th Annual Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club has been held.

Climate change matters

This year's topic: Pandemic Lessons and the New Agenda: How to Turn a Global Crisis Into an Opportunity for the Entire World. As he opened the session, Oleg Kharkhordin, Professor of the European University at St Petersburg, stressed that the pandemic has temporarily overshadowed the issue of climate change, but not for long: at the next stage, the environmental and climate agenda will be among the major drivers affecting international politics and government actions. In particular, Russia's green agenda sets a comprehensive set of challenges: environmental (the consequences of climate change, particularly for northern regions), as well as political and economic (the risk of protectionist measures).

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE AGENDA WILL BE AMONG THE MAJOR DRIVERS AFFECTING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

Vladimir Kattsov, Director of Roshydromet's Voeikov Main Geophysical Observatory and a co-author of the Climate Doctrine of the Russian Federation, noted in his speech that global warming and its consequences are undeniable. According to Mr Kattsov, changes to the climate system are in many respects already set for decades to come: the result of current proactive measures will only be seen in the second half of the century. In this context, people should think not only about mitigating anthropogenic impacts on the climate system, but also about adapting to the inevitable changes in the climate, "Successful adaptation relies on progress in solving fundamental problems faced by climate science, and on training relevant specialists. Adaptation, including proactive adaptation, must be addressed without delay," Kattsov said.

Alexey Ekaykin, Leading Researcher at the Climate and Environmental Research Laboratory of the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute, also supported investment in science as an important initiative.

"Climate scientists say that, given the current concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere, there should be no ice on Earth at all, at least not in the northern hemisphere," he said, emphasising an alarming trend: ice is melting fast in Antarctica, which could cause a significant rise in sea level, threatening many countries with coastal areas, including Russia.



During the discussion, the session participants agreed that the environmental and climate agenda will influence international policy and government action.

Nikolay Durmanov, Special Representative for Biological and Environmental Security at the Russian Ministry of Science and Higher Education, spoke about the opportunities opening up in Russia due to the current situation, with Russia currently being one of the world leaders in carbon sequestration, a crucial parameter regarding the climate. “It’s time we took leadership in this sphere. By 2035, the global carbon sequestration industry is expected to reach about USD 2–3 trillion. Development is already underway: tens of thousands of regeneration farms and forest carbon capture stations are being created. And although it is difficult to counteract global warming, the sequestration industry is still able to change the situation dramatically,” said Durmanov.

DMITRY KONOV ALSO STRESSED THAT RUSSIAN BUSINESS SEES THE IMPORTANCE OF DECARBONISATION EFFORTS BUT WOULD LIKE TO AVOID THE DEMONISATION OF FOSSIL FUELS. ALTHOUGH THESE TWO FIELDS HAVE SOME OVERLAP, THEY ARE DIFFERENT TOPICS AND RELATE TO DIFFERENT AGENDAS AND TOOLS

Sergey Zilitinkevich, Research Director at the Institute of Atmospheric and Earth System Research, University of Helsinki, explained that climate today is more than just the weather. There is a notion of physical climate (weather) and chemical climate (air, water and soil quality), which brings about the need to create a new observation system taking into account other factors besides just the weather. He said that this kind of system is now being developed, and the first observation stations can track over 1,000 parameters. As the system evolves, it will be able to measure and forecast not only the weather but also changes in the chemical climate, including pollution associated with the operation of a particular enterprise, thus helping prevent man-made disasters.

Business is ready to invest in decarbonisation

Dmitry Konov, Chairman of SIBUR's Management Board, spoke at the session. He noted that the issues of the chemical composition of the air and emissions from industrial enterprises, which are often blamed on business, should be addressed through active investment in the upgrade of process equipment, something we have seen in Russia in recent years, "In 2020, the most relevant topic for discussion among CEOs of major Russian companies, along with the pandemic, was the climate agenda. Despite the current situation in the world, this trend has not slowed down, but actually accelerated. For example, the stimulus package adopted by the European Union to support the economy and help recover from the pandemic deals largely with climate as well, which points the way for the allocation of investments across Europe."



Dmitry Konov drew attention to business demand for a single governmental authority for the climate and carbon agenda.

Konov also stressed that the climate agenda will affect consumer needs, "I am sure that in a few years, price tags in stores will indicate not only the price and, for example, the energy value of products, but their carbon footprint as well. The consumer will pay close attention not only to a product's price and benefits, but also to the contribution it makes to greenhouse gas emissions. Consequently, this must be taken into account both at the company and national levels. I am also sure that the climate agenda will determine economic priorities and influence Russia's role in international trade."

A DRAFT FEDERAL R&D PROGRAMME TO ANALYSE AND ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE IS CURRENTLY UNDER DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S INSTRUCTION. THIS WILL PARTIALLY CONSOLIDATE THE EFFORTS OF ALL STAKEHOLDERS, INCLUDING GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES, RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Dmitry Konov also stressed that Russian business sees the importance of decarbonisation efforts but would like to avoid the demonisation of fossil fuels. Although these two fields have some overlap, they are different topics and relate to different agendas and tools.

Energy efficiency in industry as a decarbonisation tool requires significant investment, "In recent decades, many energy efficiency projects in Russia progressed slowly due to relatively low internal energy costs. The carbon impact requires more active investment in such projects. I am sure that almost all major companies have this in their sights," he emphasised.

Why count carbon?

Dmitry Konov agreed that Russia could be an “Olympic champion” in carbon capture. All it is missing are effective training methods and the race clock so to speak, as it is important to take correct measurements of the impact of sequestration and the results already achieved by Russia, while making the most of the resources available in the country and fostering an ability to approve, align and adopt the methods that will be used in international trade.

“Effective measurement of sequestration in Russian industrial sectors and across the country in general would be a strong tool to position the country geopolitically, and would potentially become a key economic growth enabler going forward,” he stressed.

Konov also drew attention to business demand for a single governmental authority for the climate and carbon agenda: “We see strong activity and considerable engagement from various decision-makers at the government level, who are attempting to analyse and work out certain measures. But there is a lack of well formulated and defensible common international agenda. For me, the climate agenda can be either a crucial growth driver or a key growth constraint for the Russian economy, while also being instrumental to the country’s geopolitical positioning. In order to address these two aspects, we need to integrate the climate agenda in Russia’s foreign policy and actively promote the country’s position on the international stage.”



Andrei Fursenko: “Russia is largely the “climate kitchen” for the northern hemisphere, and all other efforts by Europe in this respect will be insufficient without Russia being on board.”

EFFECTIVE MEASUREMENT OF SEQUESTRATION IN RUSSIAN INDUSTRIAL SECTORS AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN GENERAL WOULD BE A STRONG TOOL TO POSITION THE COUNTRY GEOPOLITICALLY, AND WOULD POTENTIALLY BECOME A KEY ECONOMIC GROWTH ENABLER GOING FORWARD

Andrey Fursenko, Aide to the President of the Russian Federation, suggested that in some cases, the man-made impact should not be considered as purely negative. Any action, which includes climate change action, must first of all be backed by reliable data, recognised by the majority of researchers.

“We are currently seeing considerable progress in global monitoring and in the adoption of new emission measurement methods and sequestration practices – including the use of satellite surveillance and the analysis of all available data. For this reason, it is important to emphasise the role of science. A draft federal R&D programme to analyse and address climate change is currently under development following the President’s instruction. This will partially consolidate the efforts of all stakeholders, including government authorities, research institutions and civil society organisations,” stressed Fursenko.

He also added that the pandemic is also partially linked to climate change, since the habitat of not only virus carriers, but of pathogens themselves has changed: “The fact that this pandemic is not the last and most devastating one to face humanity is to a large extent due to climate change. Both the government and the scientific community share an understanding of this problem. However, common integrated approaches and reliable information are still lacking. I believe this is what we need to focus on in the first instance.”

The Aide to the President also stressed that a comprehensive approach is needed at the national, and also at the international level, since Russia is largely the “climate kitchen” for the northern hemisphere, and all other efforts by Europe in this respect will be insufficient without Russia being on board.