

Who Will Contradict the President?

In the heat of passionate discussions about "plutonium smuggling" the question of the "nuclear mafia" is the only danger that was forgotten. While grams of nonexistent radioactive materials are sought after in Europe, there are preparations to accommodate tons of radioactive waste in the Krasnoyarsky region. There is also production of plutonium for weapons going on. Almost official production, with the president's approval.

Before his visit to the closed city Krasnoyarsk-26 Boris Yeltsin claimed that we don't need plutonium for weapons any more. But after the visit to a group of mining and chemical enterprises where plutonium for weapons is produced he told journalists that a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant had to be built.

Is Yeltsin aware of the fact that after reprocessing of nuclear fuel, reactor plutonium is generated that can be used for creation of nuclear weapons?

Yeltsin's visit was anticipated. It was common knowledge that he would visit Krasnoyarsk-26 and discuss the construction of the RT-2 plant for nuclear fuel reprocessing. The director of the group of mining and chemical enterprises, Mr. Lebedev, and the directors of the planning and research institutes of Minatom published a letter "In support of RT-2." It said that after the construction of the RT-2 plant there would be payments to the budget of the Russian Federation of up to \$100 million every year, and to the budget of the territory of up to \$70 million, and there would also be other donations to other purposes.

But to what extent has this problem been explored? Nobody knows. It is not for nothing that 10 days before the president's visit there was a visit from Victor Michailov, the minister of atomic energy. He signed a protocol with the head of administration of Krasnoyarsky Territory, according to which a group was to be set up for preliminary talks and analysis of the investors' suggestions.

Guarantees have to be in place before the construction is started. Otherwise, financing will remain on paper and foreign waste fuel will stay in storage.

Solvency of the future clients of RT-2 is also doubtful. What countries are meant in the first place? They are Ukraine, Belarus, Bulgaria - countries where atomic power stations have reactors of VVER 1000 type. Even in the case a rich client is found who will pay part of the construction expenses, there is no guarantee that he won't change his mind in some years. And then the RT-2 plant will stand idle. There is a precedent: in Great Britain there is a nuclear fuel reprocessing plant, construction of which was partially financed by Japanese firms. It was built to reprocess

their nuclear fuel. But nowadays a similar reprocessing plant is under construction in Japan and that means Great Britain will lose its client.

Russia can attract new clients if it offers them additional services, for example dumping of their wastes on its soil. This is what is being done at the RT-1 plant in Chelyabinsk-40. But should this happen, a part of Russia would be turned into a gigantic burial ground.

Reprocessing of nuclear fuel is accompanied by isolation of reactor plutonium, which can be used for production of nuclear warheads. About 30 tons of plutonium isolated from atomic power station fuel at the plant RT-1 is stored in Chelyabinsk-40. After the second plant is constructed we'll get dozens of tons more plutonium. There is no guarantee that part of this plutonium won't go to the third countries.

The RT-2 plant will be built on polluted soil of a ? military plutonium complex that is 40 years old. According to the state committee on environmental protection, engineering-economic grounds of RT-2 are not well substantiated. In the protocol of agreement between Minatom of Russia and the administration of Krasnoyarsky Territory it is stated that RD & E (research, development and evaluation) of RT-2 should be carried out and recent requirements for environmental protection should be taken into consideration. The sides seem to reach a compromise: not to hurry with the construction but once again to think it over, to analyze and to take into account opinions of professionals from all related areas, not only military atomic scientists. There was no discussion of the RT-2 plant construction after the president's visit to the group of chemical enterprises.

The president was brief: "RT-2 has to be built! Don't contradict the president!" Neither the people nor the reasons that made the president jump to this conclusion are known. There might be some clue among people who were with Yeltsin during his visit, for example, Mr. Zubov, the head of administration of Krasnoyarsky Territory. He supported the construction of the RT-2 plant and said that the number of uranium deposits in Russia are limited while reprocessing of nuclear fuel will help to reuse uranium. There will also be less uranium extracted from deposits and the environmental situation will improve.

This is a trite argument. Minatom officials don't use it any more. Russia is provided with highly-enriched uranium (which comes after dismantling warheads) for many years. Prices for natural uranium on the world market are going down because former USSR republics sell it as their main source of foreign currency. Our plants for uranium enrichment already work for foreign atomic power stations.

To substantiate the construction of the plant Minatom leadership put forward a concept of an exclusive nuclear production cycle in Russia. But this is what they want us to believe. While they plan to reprocess waste fuel from VVER 1000 reactors (there is less than one ton in the basin of the RT-2 plant), there are already several tons of waste fuel from RBMK reactors and it isn't expected to be reprocessed. I find it illogical. If the "exclusive nuclear cycle" is proposed, then all fuel should be reprocessed, including RBMK fuel.