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To: Environment and Social; NGO
Cc: Wallis, Richard; laletyanin@yandex.ru
Subject: complain of EBRD granting to Vinci and Euravia from Yablokov

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Dear Colleagues,

I would like to draw your attention to possible granting by EBRD to Vinci and Euravia French companies for building Moscow – St. Petersburg pay-highway. The planned route of this road (section 15 – 58 km) will dissect Khimki forest, ruin its ecosystem and make the total elimination of the forest just a question of time. Khimki forest is situated near Moscow and is a part of now dwindling woodland-park belt around Russian capital. One can still see in this wood both groves of age-old oak trees and cranberry bogs. The neighborhood of such different types of vegetation is unique for Central Russia. Khimki forest is a home for many rare species of plants and animals (mainly insects), which have been included into Red Books of Moscow Region. Forest also important for air cleaning. Due to the existence of the forest air condition in Khimki town is better than in Moscow City. The forest is also a traditional place of recreation for dwellers of Khimki town. A lot of people visit it on weekends and holidays.

A wide public movement in defense of the forest has grown in Khimki town and in Moscow. It unites several thousands people irrespective of gender, age, profession, size of income or political party sympathies. Indeed, “Movement in defense of Khimki forest” is one of very few examples of civic society self-organization in Russia today, in time of public disillusionment and apathy (<http://ecmoru.livejournal.com/>).

The wood defenders point out, that felling of the forest for highway building contradicts several laws of Russia. Point 5 of Part 3 of Article 105 of Russian Federation Forest Code (2006) forbids any capital construction in ‘woodland-park zone’ category of forests, to which Khimki forest belongs. Article 11 of Federal Law ‘On transition of lands or land plots from one to another category’ (2004), allows any transition of forest lands to other category in the interest of capital construction only ‘in the absence of other ways of

possible placement of these [capital construction] objects’.

So the forest defenders treat the whole plan of felling wood for building highway as a typical example of lawlessness, which unfortunately prevails in Russia today. There are other strong arguments supporting this point of view. In November 2008 independent journalist Mr. Mikhail Beketov, an outspoken forest defender, was attacked near his house in a village not far from Khimki and beaten extremely severely. He was found unconscious and in a terrible state only next day. Though his life was saved, the man remained disabled forever. There were other attacks against independent journalists and activists in Khimki, though with less tragic results. No one of these crimes was ever investigated by police.

Russian ecological organizations have serious objections not only against Khimki forest section (15 – 58 km) of the projected highway, but also against several other sections of this road in Tver Region. In those places felling of valuable age-old woods is also planned. But the highway builders, notably Vinci company, avoid any dialogue with environmentalists.

We are quite sure, that any loans to Vinci and Euravia for building Moscow – St. Petersburg highway will bring harm both to environment and civic society in Russia. On the other hand, such a loan will be a grant to Russian corrupt bureaucracy. So, I took attention the EBRD to the granting loans to Vinci and Euravia French companies environmentally dangerous project.

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