

Letter from the Movement to Defend Khimki Forest to European Commissioners regarding recent developments and ongoing pressures on civil society related to the protests to save the Khimki Forest

Dear participants of the meeting on Khimki Forest in EC,

I would like to inform you about the last developments on the “Khimki Forest vs. Moscow – St. Petersburg Motorway” problem.

President Medvedev has not taken any decision on the project yet. Meantime, the new Mayor of Moscow, Mr. Sobyenin, announced priorities of his administration in solving the transportation problem of Moscow. He insisted that the main things to be done are modernization of the existing roads together with the development of public electric transport. “Severnaya Rokada project” (which is, in fact, a prolongation of the planned motorway to Moscow) is not in his priority list (as far as we can see from media reports). Therefore, our suspicions that the new motorway will merge into the overloaded Moscow Ring Road got more evidence.

Nevertheless, Minister of Transportation Mr. Levitin announced that his Ministry started an analysis of alternative options for the Moscow – St. Petersburg motorway. He plans to submit the results to President and Russian government by December.

We have little trust to these results because Mr. Levitin is mentioned in the Transparency International’s analysis as a person having possible corruption interest in the existing routing of the motorway (i.e., through Khimki Forest).

An independent expert commission on the project started its work as well. We have a representative in this commission, and will inform you about its work.

Our movement is still under a severe pressure, as well as independent journalists writing about the Khimki Forest problem.

On November, 4 one of our activists, Head of Khimki organization of the "Pravoe Delo" party Konstantin Fetisov was attacked. At night November 6 to 7 a journalist Oleg Kashin who wrote many articles in Kommersant newspaper on our problem was beaten, too.

Unknown criminals assaulted Konstantin Fetisov near his house in Khimki, and hit him with a baseball bat. Konstantin is in a very bad state in the hospital. Bones in the back of his head were crushed, the brain has serious damages. Eyes are damaged, too. Local police have not shown any activity in investigating his case. They firstly even have not taken the broken bat that was abandoned by the attackers.

Konstantin was an active participant of the Save Khimki Forest movement. He took part in the fighting for Khimki Forest this summer, and was unlawfully arrested for taking part in rallies for Khimki Forest.

On November,3 he was participating in a demonstration for closing the open dumping ground in Levoberezhny District of Khimki. This is the very dumping ground that is to be bypassed by the planned Moscow–St.Petersburg motorway destroying thus a tiny forest strip. The protective forest strip separates the 50–m high heap of waste from residential buildings. The dumping ground makes environmental situation there quite terrific, especially when it catches fire – even without the new motorway.

The demonstration was banned by the authorities – as usual in Khimki. Despite it, Fetisov with his friends managed to block temporarily circulation of trucks to the dumping ground. Finally, he was arrested for a short time. Next day, he was attacked.

Oleg Kashin wrote a row of articles on our problem. The most scandalous one was his interview with an anonymous participant of the antifascists' attack against Khimki administrative buildings on July, 28 as a protest against the clearing of Khimki Forest. Moscow District police asked him to disclose his source of information but he refused to do it, knowing probably about multiple reports of human right abuses (including tortures) toward detained antifascists. After this, he started to receive threats, and the website of pro- governmental youth movement "Molodaya Gvardia" even published an article openly calling for a "punishment" for the journalist.

Oleg Kashin, like Konstantin Fetisov, was attacked near his house. He got a serious brain trauma and other injures. Like Fetisov, he is in coma now.

It looks like an assassination attempt – very similar to one against Mikhail Beketov two years ago. The investigation of Beketov's case was recently stopped due to its "complicity" and "lack of evidence". Little doubt that it served as a "green light" for further attacks.

By the way, the authorities of Khimki still try to bring half-dead Beketov to court – since he is still accused in "blackmail" against Mayor of Khimki Mr. Strelchenko. The "blackmail" is, in fact, an interview given by Beketov shortly before the assassination attempt against him. His car had been exploded by "unknown criminals". Beketov openly accused Mr. Strelchenko in hiring those criminals as a revenge for his articles including those about Khimki Forest. Shortly after this interview, Beketov was both beaten with baseball bats (just like Fetisov), and a lawsuit submitted against him.

We have also a lawsuit against more than ten of our activists together with two journalists. Mr. Semchenko, the head of "Teplotekhnik" company which performed cutting down of trees in Khimki Forest this summer, submitted a lawsuit demanding RUR 9,000,000 (about EUR 225,000) compensation for the "work undone". He admitted in an interview to the "Komsomolskaya Pravda" newspaper that his company hired the masked thugs that threaten environmentalists. He wants a compensation of these expenses, too.

Despite this pressure, we are resolute to go on with the fight for Khimki Forest. We are about to organize a rally in Moscow on November, 14 against the terror and pressure. Moreover, we, together with Greenpeace and Bellona, submitted lawsuits against Teplotekhnik and Rosavtodor accusing them in illegal destruction of the forest. The point is that not all the necessary permissions were obtained correctly by the performers of destruction of Khimki Forest this summer. We hope for the success, though Russian justice is known to be very loyal to those who have good connections in the Russian

government. In our case, media reported interests of Arkady Rotenberg (a friend of Putin) behind the motorway project.

We will keep you informed about further development,

Best wishes,

Mikhail Matveev

Movement to Defend Khimki Forest – Ecooborona