

Brussels, 08.09.2010

Dear Mr. President,

Open letter on ensuring a fair hearing on the Moscow - St. Petersburg motorway

We would like to welcome your decision to stop the destruction of trees and habitat in the Khimki Forest Park. The forest is now needed more than ever to continue to be the "lungs" of Moscow, especially in the light of the recent forest fires causing choking smog, health problems and even deaths in the city.

Nevertheless, we are alarmed by recent information that the local authorities in Khimki as well as the Russian Ministry for Transportation have been appointed as the main organizers of the public discussion on the project. Our main concern is driven by the fact that they are known as the most vigorous supporters of the project in its present state, and the result of any "discussion" under their leadership is pre-determined. The attempts by the Khimki authorities to use various methods of pressure – from threats to direct lies – to make people sign petitions in support of the existing motorway placement, which have already been reported, threaten the main principles of democracy.

According to public opinion polls, about two thirds of Muscovites oppose the motorway passing through Khimki Forest, including the Russian Association of Car Owners who condemned the project in its present state. There are at least five possible alternative routes for the motorway, and the worst option has been chosen.

We draw your attention to the fact that violence and intimidation perpetrated by police is still being used against activists.

First of all, we ask you to ensure that the process of public hearings and expert discussion is organised in a fair and transparent manner and genuinely aims to take all sides into account and reach an agreeable solution on the route of the motorway.

Second, we ask you to ensure that an end is put to the old tactics of violence and intimidation against activists. Investigations need to be carried out on the reported cases and the culprits must be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Thirdly, we are sure that forming a third-party, non-biased committee, to consider the concerns of all sides, acting as a mediator would assist the process of finding the best route for the motorway considerably. No more back door deals - transparency and fairness should be the core values at the negotiations.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Harms, Co-President of the Greens/EFA Group in the EP
Monica Frassoni, EGP Spokesperson
Alexey Kozlov, EGP Committee member