



To Mr. Jose Manuel Barroso,  
President of the European Commission

23.02.2011

Dear Mr. Barroso,

We, representatives of the coalition of non-governmental organizations “For the Forests of Moscow Region”, appeal to you to halt the participation of the European Union's financing institutions in toll motorway projects in Russia until there is a serious improvements in the human rights and public participation situation connected with such projects.

It is likely that during your meeting with Prime Minister Putin these questions will be discussed. Not denying the importance of co-operation between the European Union and Russia, we would like to draw your attention to the following facts.

The planning and implementing of toll motorway projects in Russia is carried out without taking into account the principles of sustainable development, conservation of biodiversity, or public opinion. Almost all the projects under construction or planned in the near future are subject to corresponding serious problems.

- The Western Speed Diameter, St. Petersburg - the route of the motorway is planned to pass through the territory of the Yuntolovo wildlife reserve, which -has resulted in numerous civil protests.

- The Odintsovo bypass is due to be routed through the centre of the Podushkinsky forest park, which will cause unjustified and heavy damage to the environment.

- The Moscow Central Ring Road. The realization in the current variant of the CRR project together with the adjoining infrastructure will lead to the destruction of forests in the area exceeding the surface area of Moscow. During the examination of the project's environmental impact, and later during the public hearings, Greenpeace Russia established numerous violations of legislation, which have still not been rectified.

- The 15-58 km section of the Moscow - St.Petersburg motorway (intended to be the first part of the motorway constructed) is planned to pass through the Khimki forest in the suburbs of Moscow. The Khimki forest park has a vital role in supporting of favourable living conditions for local people and is the main recreation zone for thousands of people. The attempt to build a motorway through it has therefore caused one of the sharpest ecological conflicts in contemporary Russia.

Despite the availability of superior alternative options for the motorway construction, the Russian authorities are still pushing the building of the motorway through the forest. It would lead to the degradation and de-facto destruction of more than 1000 hectares of the forest. Civil activists have been repeatedly harassed and unlawfully arrested by police and beaten by security guards, unknown

thugs as well as Neo-Nazi groups apparently contracted for the job. As a result, local journalist Mikhail Beketov and activist Konstantin Fetisov were literally crippled and are now heavily disabled.

After mass protests last summer, in late August Russian President Medvedev was forced to stop the construction and initiate additional public and expert discussions on the project. According to the President's ruling, our Coalition organized an independent expert examination of the project. The expert group consisted of 18 persons, 15 doctors in various fields.

However, on December 14, 2010 the Russian Government announced its decision to proceed with the building of the road through the forest – even not waiting for the results of expert examination. Therefore, the results of the expert examination were not taken into account at all. The examination has clearly demonstrated that the chosen option is the worst one among 11 considered options. It does not solve real transportation problems, and does not meet European directives on transportation. The expert examination also includes a long list of legal violations committed by the promoters of the project.

As a direct result of the governmental decision, repression against activists has recently resumed, including the fabrication of criminal cases and threats to deprive activists of their children.

Mr. Barroso, we are grateful to European financing structures, including the EBRD and EIB for their reasonable decision not to participate in the construction of the motorway through Khimki forest. Nevertheless, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that French group Vinci is still involved in the project in spite of all the human rights abuses it has entailed.

Moreover, Russian state corporation Avtodor is reportedly carrying out negotiations with the EBRD about participation in other projects, including other sections of the Moscow -St. Petersburg motorway. We have every reason to suppose that it is planned to use European investments in those sections where problems are not so well-known. It would allow the Russian Government to use state funds as well as heavily state-influenced Russian banks to finance the “dirty” parts of the motorways.

We kindly ask you, Mr. Barroso, to pay priority attention to the questions of ecology and human rights during your consideration of collaboration with the Russian government in the field of road construction. We emphatically recommend to the European institutions to stay away from participation in the programmes of toll motorway construction in Russia until the existing conflicts are solved (and, in particular, until the scandalous and dangerous route through the Khimki forest is revised). The EIB and EBRD are fond of arguing that their involvement in projects helps to raise standards, however it is clear that in the Khimki case they have had no effect on maintaining human rights and public participation standards during their communication with the project promoter.

We consider that an approach of maintaining a distance from Russian road projects until human rights and public participation issues are fulfilled is completely in accordance with the meaning of the resolution of the European Parliament of February 17, 2011 on the situation in Russia. It will facilitate the development of our country as a modern democratic state, implementing the principles of sustainable development and the priority of human rights.

We thank you for your time and look forward to seeing what action you will now take.

Yours sincerely,

*WWF Russia*  
*Greenpeace Russia*  
*Biodiversity Conservation Center*  
*Russian Birds Conservation Union*  
*Social-Ecological Union*  
*The Movement to Defend Khimki Forest*