

SECOND SESSION

**Vision 2030: Safeguarding our Environment,
Seas and Oceans for Future Generations**



Mr. Oleg Nilov
Member of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly
of the Russian Federation

Speech of Mr Oleg Nilov
at the Digital 29th BSPC on 24 August 2020

Oleg Nilov offered his greetings from St Petersburg. He noted that he was near one of the most important waterways, in a building that served as its museum. The canals and the draining of St Petersburg had been a very important project and provided a very good example of cooperation in terms of financing. Most of the water of the Baltic Sea had been drained out of the city, as well as the wastewater. In fact, there were only two districts in St Petersburg that were not connected to the wastewater drainage system which had been established with the help of international cooperation. In that regard, he offered his gratitude to the Finnish colleagues whose side had provided financing. He further thanked his Swedish and Norwegian colleagues for their countries' assistance. Mr Nilov underlined that this wastewater system was working well, and its implementation had gone ahead without any unnecessary comments or arguments about democracy.

Beyond the immediate water concerns, the speaker pointed out that water was the basis of their conference as it encompassed the Baltic Sea states. He reminded his audience that air was equally important to their lives, that the climate mattered. People should be able to live without flooding, without overheating and without forest fires. He praised the efforts of so many colleagues in the BSPC in the framework of the Green Agenda, particularly in the area of green energy. Moreover, Mr Nilov wished to draw their attention to a glaring misbalance. Much discussion was devoted to climate change, global warming, carbon emissions. On the one hand, there was hypotrophia which had to be looked at, but there was another area that was not talked about enough. This aspect was forest fires.

Forest fires were a major problem in Russia. As a matter of fact, it was one of the greatest issues, if not right at the top of the list of environmental problems. The same was true of the United States, Brazil and many other countries, such as Australia. Forest fires were not only a disaster for these countries in themselves, but they also proved disastrous for the environment of the entire planet. That was because the fire's emissions were entering the atmosphere.

As an example, he referred to climatologists' reports from June: In Siberia, only 30 per cent of Russian forests remained. 59 million tonnes of carbon had been emitted into the atmosphere through forest fires. This was the equivalent of what Portugal was emitting in an entire year. 285 million tonnes of carbon had been emitted into the atmosphere as a result of forest fires in recent years in Russia alone. Considering all the other countries where such fires were major issues, the overall figure was immensely larger. Mr Nilov underlined that this was a major problem. In the northernmost forest fires in recorded history in the tundra, 50 kilometres before the northern ice sheet, the turf of the tundra had recently caught fire. If this were to spread, it would prove impossible to ever put this fire out. The level of carbon emitted into the atmosphere, if that were to happen, would simply be incredible. Ten to fifteen million hectares of tundra were lost every year to forest fires. That equalled the size of Greece, each year, Mr Nilov underlined. He asked his listeners to imagine what might be left after 2030 in terms of forests, and what huge amounts of carbon would be emitted through the conflagration. That consideration did not even take into account that the forests in and of themselves ordinarily served as carbon sinks. If trees were burning, they could no longer absorb carbon.

The speaker pointed out that this was a massive problem and that the BSPP needed to discuss it. He believed they had to speak about what had to be done, that decisions had to be taken on how to address the problem of forest fires. At the very least, they should consider if there were any budgets that could be put forward to this end.

He suggested that discussions should be raised, not only in the BSPP but also in other venues, on how to take the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Accord further. Following in their footsteps, Mr Nilov called for a Baltic Sea Accord to mitigate carbon emissions through forest fires, as one of the main sources of carbon emissions into the atmosphere on this planet. He said they should draw attention to this issue and channel funding into mitigating losses in this area. If you wanted to build a home, he proposed, you should have to plant a tree. If you wanted to buy a car, you should have to plant a whole forest. That would be necessary to compensate for the carbon emissions caused by your car or home.

Mr Nilov asked the other countries to consider what options they saw in this respect, particularly the nations suffering from this problem. He emphasised again that millions of hectares were being decimated each year. This was an issue that they had to start talking about. The speaker also called for an international foundation to be set up to alleviate the consequences of this problem, to tackle forest fires both in poor and richer countries as well as in more remote areas. Here, he mentioned Australia and the US as examples. Neither of them seemed to be in a position to deal with this challenge on their own. Therefore, Mr Nilov believed there had to be a “green army” of firefighters in order to tackle this problem in the near future.

If this problem was not resolved, he stated, then there was no point to talking about burning carbon at all. Indeed, planes or cars, with all their contributions to global warming, were just one part of the climate challenge, with forest fires responsible for much in their own right.

In conclusion, Mr Nilov pointed to California as a current example. In the US, hundreds of thousands of people were having to flee their homes because of the forest fires raging there. Billions of dollars were being lost at this very moment. Recent years had shown that even in democracies, not everything was perfect. The life of the forest was far more important than elections, he suggested, or political fights or discussions about human rights. Therefore, he believed it was necessary to go back to the BSPP’s original agenda and talk about what were the most important issues concerning the foundation of life – peace, the forests, the water and the quality of the air. These surely were more important than political discussions, he affirmed. The latter were something they could talk about separately, in their parliaments and at the next in-person meetings.

He concluded his speech by stating his hope that they could indeed meet in person again very soon.