

Bureaucratic paradox

Our country missed its chance

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Photo of Olga Baumgertner

The purpose of the IRENA agency is to ensure the continuous growth of renewable energy use globally. "It's essential to develop renewable energy sources for Russia" – announced recently once again the President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev. A cursory glance on web pages showed that the Leader of Russia raised the issue of renewable energy sources (RES) in varying degrees several times a month last year.

Links to specific documents can be found online. For example, the signing of six orders, including measures to enhance renewable energy use by companies in March 2010, and in April he signed a decree on some measures of renewable energy use. Earlier, in January 2009 the government decree was signed, which set the target of increasing the RES share in total country power balance from 0,1% to 4,5% by 2020. Quite modest compared to other countries.

However the political will of Russian administration was confronted with officials sabotage. This is the only explanation of the Ministry of Energy position concerning International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), established a year ago. 142 countries and the European Union have already signed its constituent documents on April 1, 2010.

Russia didn't participate in IRENA establishment. The prospects of RES development in Russia are mentioned to some extent on the Ministry of Energy website, but IRENA activities, its goals and objectives, Russia's attitude toward the agency have no coverage whatsoever.

So, what is IRENA, and why the Ministry of Energy has taken such a dislike to it?

The need for an international organization to coordinate international cooperation in RES implementation was mentioned for the first time in early 1980's. This was the main theme of the first UN Renewable Energy Conference, held in 1981 in Nairobi. However, the idea was declined by the industrialized countries. It took two decades to realize the seriousness of danger caused by climate change and human activities in energy sector for the future of Earth and to take practical steps in establishing IRENA. The first meeting of IRENA Preparatory Commission took place on 27 January 2007. In April 2008 a conference was organized on IRENA establishment preparations, attended by 54 countries delegations. 75 countries signed the agency charter at foundation conference held on January 26, 2009.

I would like to point out the attitude of Russia to all IRENA-related events, without mentioning names. One of the nameless experts in late April 2009, three months after the foundation conference, stated at very representative energy security roundtable meeting that "the establishment of international renewable energy agency is being elaborated at the moment" This statement indicates low level competence of our experts', or

the fact that IRENA existence was deliberately suppressed in Russia.

Germany, France, Spain, the Scandinavian countries, actively supported the establishment of the new international energy agency. At the same time, the leading and largest economic powers like the U.S., Japan, China, Brazil, were not that interested in IRENA establishment and didn't sign the charter during the founding conference. There were different arguments to the point, but all of them were nothing more than excuses. Russia was and remains among the abstaining from signing the charter document.