Environmental Impact Assessment System and Practice of Public Participation in the Russian Federation

Abstract
The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) system in the Russian Federation has an extensive set of rules, the main ones are the Assessment of the Environmental Impact (OVOS) of a project and the State Environmental Review (SER). The SER is designed as an investigation of both a project and its OVOS by an independent expert commission, which is appointed by the federal and regional environmental bodies. The decision of the commission is binding. In addition, a Public Environmental Review (PER) can be conducted by NGOs and recognized by the state.

A mandatory component of the EIA in Russia is public participation. The process of public participation is regulated by Russian legislation (for example the Land Code, the Assessment of the Environmental Impact guidelines and autonomous regional laws) and can take various forms. The regulations for public participation meet the requierments of the Aarhus-Convention and partly go beyound them. But how are they applied in practice? This is to be investigated in the project supported by the Volkswagen Foundation and the Technical University of Berlin, in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Sciences, based on ecological expert reports (environmental test of projects). There are a number of case studies used to observe the extent to which the public has an impact on environmental decision-making. Selected cases include examples in which the public was passive, in which it undertook limited activities, and in which participation was strong and projects were improved or stopped, but institutional forms of public partizipation have to be completed by non-institutional forms. According to the current state of research, this situation can be seen as a step in a process, which results could certainly be the establishment of a democratic Russian society.

Keywords: Russian Federation, State Environmental Review, Public Environmental Review Referendum, Public Participation