ON THE LEGAL REGULATION OF THE FUEL AND ENERGY COMPLEX FUNCTIONING IN EXTREME CONDITIONS: GENERAL APPROACHES (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC)

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The author reviews the issues of legal regulation of public relations in the Fuel and Energy Complex of the Russian Federation during the extreme period of the coronavirus pandemic. The author concluded that neither Russia nor any other foreign country had been ready to face the pandemic, both in terms of an action plan arrangement or legislative and regulatory control. Which, among other things, has had a negative impact on the performance of the Fuel and Energy Complex companies. For a radical solution of the issue, the article suggests and substantiates three options with due account for the fact that it is impossible to rule out potential next waves of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic or other global natural or anthropogenic catastrophes. The study was funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research within the frameworks of research project No. 20-011-00270.

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o one doubts the fact that the 2020 coronavirus pandemic is a natural catastrophe requiring the state to take prompt and extreme measures in every sphere of social and economic life, including such vital sector as the Fuel and Energy Complex. After all, ensuring energy security of our country is a strategic issue; energy security is part of

the national security, while the proper legal regulation for energy security is the cornerstone of energy law order. [1] V.V. Romanova notes that energy security is the key category for energy law, since its proper legal regulation testifies to observing the key principles of energy law. Speaking of legal risks in the sphere of energy security, one means, first of all, the possible

occurrence of debatable situations, controversies due to uncertainties in the legal regulation, gaps, conflicts in legal regulation, and the misbalance in the legal status of various participants of public relations. [2]

It is evident that Russian energy strategy up to 2035 as approved by the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated June 9, 2020, is a reaction to the coronavirus pandemic, which, without doubt, represents a real threat to energy security, including, first of all, a threat to consistent uninterrupted operations of the Fuel and Energy Complex enterprises. The potential extreme impact of the coronavirus pandemic on such sphere as nuclear energy seems even more dangerous (the problematics of legal liability for violations in this field have been analyzed in legal literature, [3] however, such analysis does not cover periods of extreme situations).

Article 56 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation provides that in a state of emergency, for ensuring citizens' safety and protecting the constitutionally established state order, particular limitations may be imposed on rights and freedoms, in accordance with a federal constitutional law, with the scope and timeframes indicated, and that the state of emergency may be declared in the entire territory of the Russian Federation or its particular parts under the circumstances and the procedure as established by a federal constitutional law; at the same time, the said article of the Constitution of the Russian Federation lists the rights and freedoms that cannot be limited.

However, with the coronavirus pandemic rapidly growing since March 2020, and covering absolutely all aspects of life in Russia (and in the majority of other countries, but they are not the topic of out article), including numerous facilities of the Fuel and Energy Complex, Federal Constitutional Law (FCL) No. 3-ΦK3 (version dated July 3, 2016) *On the state of emergency* dated May 30, 2001, has not been utilized. According to Art. 1, Part 1 of the said Law, a state of emergency is defined as a special legal regime for the operation of state and local authorities, business entities (irrespective of their form of incorporation or ownership), their officials, and public associations, which

permits, as established by that FCL, particular limitations of the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens, foreign citizens, stateless persons, the rights of organizations and public associations, as well as imposing additional duties on them. According to Article 2 of the said Law, the goals of the state of emergency are eliminating of the circumstances triggering its introduction, ensuring the protection of the rights and freedoms of a person and citizen, as well as the protection of the constitutionally established state order in the Russian Federation. Article 3 of the Law states that the state of emergency may be declared only under the circumstances posing an immediate threat to life and security of citizens or the constitutionally established state order of the Russian Federation, where the elimination of such circumstances is impossible without applying extreme measures. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to: natural and anthropogenic emergencies, emergent environmental situations including epidemics and epizootics occurred due to accidents, hazardous natural phenomena, catastrophes, natural calamities, and other disasters involving (or potentially involving) death of people, damage to health of people or environment, considerable financial losses (or loss of property) and disruption of human living environment and requiring large-scale emergency-and-rescue or other urgent measures. Such state is declared, whether in the entire territory of the Russian Federation or in its particular parts, by a Decree of the President of the Russian Federation with an immediate notification to the Federation Council.

But legislative regulation of public relations in Russia in an extreme situation is not limited to the said FCL on the state of emergency (and, if it has not been applied, that means that the legal regime of the state or emergency, curfew time, etc., have not been introduced). However, other acts have been applied.

First of all, one should mention (as relevant to our topic) Federal Law No. 68-Φ3 *On the Protection of the Population and Territories against Natural and Anthropogenic Emergencies* dated December 21, 1994 (as heavily amended). However, one would seriously doubt its full-scope utilization in the then effective version

during the coronavirus pandemic, since Article 2 of Federal Law No. 98-Φ3 On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on the Prevention and Elimination of Emergency Situations urgently adopted at the onset of the pandemic on April 1, 2020, supplements Part 1, Article 1 of the abovementioned Federal Law dated December 21, 1994 (as amended) as follows: after word "catastrophes" the phrase "the spread of a disease posing a threat to the public" was added. Adding that phrase means, at least, that the federal legislator in adopting and further amending the Federal Law (FL) dated December 21, 1994, have not been perceiving "the spread of a disease posing a threat to the public", i.e. an epidemic or pandemic, as a natural or anthropogenic "catastrophe", which shows that the legislator has not eliminated that conceptual (rather than a terminological) gap for more than 25 years.

The said Federal Law dated April 1, 2020, also urgently amended fifteen federal laws, while its Articles 16 through 20 vest in the Government of the Russian Federation a range of additional powers much needed in the current epidemiological situation.

A bit later, that Federal Law and 22 other federal laws were vastly amended by Federal Law No. 166-Φ3 On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation in Order to Take Urgent Measures for Ensuring Sustainable Economic Development and Preventing the Consequences of the Spread of the New Coronavirus Infection dated June 8, 2020.

The Government of the Russian Federation was forced to adopt numerous legal acts regulating economic relations, including those in the energy sector, during the storm of the coronavirus pandemic in the country. For instance, in the sphere of lease, Order No. 439 On Establishing Requirements for the Terms and Conditions of Deferred Payment of Rent under Real Estate Lease Agreements (which also establishes the Requirements for the Terms and Conditions of Deferred Payment of Rent...) dated April 3, 2020, which, inter alia, provides for support measures related to corporate property tax, land tax, and land rent for the real estate for the grace period. In the sphere of credit relations, Order No. 435 On Establishing

the Maximum Amount of Credit (Loan) for Credits (Loans) in Relation to Which the Borrower may DEMAND the lender to Change the Terms of the Credit Agreement (Loan Agreement) and Suspend the Performance by the Borrower of its obligations dated April 3, 2020, was adopted, also approving The Rules for Granting a Grace Period (Right to Pay in Installments) for Paying Taxes, Advance Payments of Taxes, and Insurance Contributions establishing the procedure for granting a grace period (right to pay in installments) for the payment of taxes, advance payments of tax, and insurance contributions to organizations and individual entrepreneurs (the "interested persons") operating in the spheres most affected by the deteriorating situation related to the spread of the new coronavirus infection; the list of such spheres is established by the Government of the Russian Federation. The "interested persons" may also include strategic, systemand town-forming organizations, affected by the worsened situation due to the spread of the new coronavirus infection but operating in other areas, in accordance with individual decisions of the Government of the Russian Federation, etc.

Against that background, Order of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 694 On the Approval Procedure for Draft Decisions of Senior Officials (Heads of the Supreme Government Bodies) of the Constituent Entities of The Russian Federation on the Suspension (or Restriction; Including by Determining the Specifics of the Working Hours or Number of Employees) of the Operations of Particular Organizations and Individual Entrepreneurs Located in a Particular Territory within a Respective Constituent Entity of the Russian Federation dated May 16, 2020, adopted pursuant to Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 316 On Determining the Procedure for Extension of the Measures Ensuring the Sanitary and Epidemiological Well-Being of the Public in the Constituent Entities of the Russian Federation in Connection with the Spread of the New Coronavirus Infection (COVID-19) dated May 11, 2020; the Order validates the Rules for approval of such draft decisions.

According to legal research literature, a total of 855 documents has been adopted in Russia to combat the spread of the new coronavirus infection, including 388 normative legal acts

and 451 guideline and reference documents; among those, there are 25 federal laws, 16 decrees of the President of the Russian Federation, and 119 orders of the Government of the Russian Federation. The regulatory legal acts adopted have for their goals: improving various aspects of administrative and legal regimes used to minimize the negative consequences of emergencies; stage-by-stage establishment and definition of the specifics of lifting restrictions and bans to ensure the sanitary and epidemiological wellbeing of the public; improvement of medical care, as well as the supply of medicines and medical products; provision of state support to individuals, organizations, and individual entrepreneurs; defining the specifics of corporate relations; improving the mechanisms of the Russian budgetary system; regulation of the specifics of educational activity. [4]

The conceptual structure used in (and, consequently, legitimized by) the abovementioned federal laws, decrees of the President of the Russian Federation, and other orders of the Government of the Russian Federation varies. As it was said earlier, the state of emergency as a regime of an extra hazardous situation for the society, state, citizen, economy, etc. has been introduced neither in the entire territory of Russia nor in its particular regions. However, other regimes (other than regimes of an extra hazardous situation for the public) have been introduced (or, in some cases, not introduced officially, but rather implied or emerging in practice: the emergency situation regime, the regime of mandatory social distancing (which is linguistically not logical, since, "social distance" in Russian is the distance between the rich and the poor, and it is measured in money, and not in meters; here it is more appropriate to say "a safe sanitary (or anti-epidemiological, etc.) distance") the masks & gloves regime, the regime of citizens' self-isolation, etc. Rulemakers in Russian regions have also contributed to that range of concepts: for instance, Moscow Mayor's Decree No. 12YM On the Introduction of the High Alert Regime dated March 5, 2020 (as amended on June 22, 2020) introduces the notion of high alert regime.

And, since such federal legislative (and other legal) regulation was taking place in the

extreme environment (during the coronavirus pandemic), further developed (and elaborated) by the federal and municipal rule-making ministries and agencies in Russian regions and municipalities under the same extreme conditions, it was characterized by an enormous scale, multilayered nature, ambiguity, and inconsistency. No doubt that the phenomenon was necessitated by evident force-majeure circumstances. And, since such regulations have been developed and adopted in an extreme situation, the rule-makers have not been able to work them out thoroughly, not to mention substantiating them by legal research.

The regulations had deficiencies: for example, new Prosecutor General I. Krasnov in his first annual report to the Federation Council noted that unfair employers used the self-isolation regime as a ground to evade paying wages to, or even dismiss their employees. [5]

During the extreme period of the coronavirus pandemic, international legal regulation was no reliable source of guidelines for the national systemic legislative or other legal regulation. Thus, a report by the Council of Europe entitled Respecting Democracy, Rule of Law, and Human Rights in the Framework of the Crisis, says, in fact, that the supplementary statutory norms adopted in the state of emergency must comply with constitutions and international standards and involve "minimal alteration of normal rules and procedures of democratic decision-making, as well as the exceptional measures taken should be limited to a certain period". [6] Which is only natural and goes without saying.

This may be suitable is the legal nature of various special legal regimes for extreme situations has been vastly researched. [7]

On the whole, still, it seems that general deficiencies in the extreme legislative and statutory rule-making mechanism forced the President of the Russian Federation to use "manual control" for certain issues. In particular, on April 29, 2020, during the Meeting on Developing the Energy Sector (live-broadcasted by Russia-24 channel), V.V. Putin noted that the coronavirus had had its impact on the economy of the Fuel and Energy Complex, which involves systemic issues going beyond the national border, since the spread of the coronavirus and

associated restrictions had reduced the world economy's growth rates and global GDP.

The Meeting resulted in a list of instructions of the President of the Russian Federation requiring, in particular, the Government of the Russian Federation to ensure, by June 15, an increased control of the reduction of the coronavirus COVID-19 risks at production facilities of the Fuel and Energy Complex operating on a rotational schedule. The Cabinet of Ministers has been also instructed to ensure the non-application of sanctions for the oil production levels inconsistent with the values provided for in initial oilfield development plans during the term of the agreement on the oil production limitation between OPEC and non-OPEC countries. For the same term, Transneft and Russian Railways must introduce special tariffs for oil and oil product transportation. In addition, the Cabinet was instructed to ensure the conditions for forming the pool of drilled but uncompleted oil wells, as well as for establishing the excise duty offset for ethane or liquefied petroleum gas, depending on the investments in petrochemical capacities. Among other things, the Government of the Russian Federation must also ensure updating of the location scheme of electric power facilities in Russia (including nuclear power plants (NPPs)) for the period up to 2035; subsidized interest rates on loans for providing entities operating in the heat and electric power sector with working capital; as well as the introduction of a moratorium for 2020–2021 on the adoption of regulatory decisions worsening the conditions for doing business for the electric power industry and heat supply organizations as in force on January 1, 2020. In addition, by June 15, the Government of the Russian Federation must work out the issues (and, where necessary, make decisions) regarding the payment of excise duty on motor fuel when it is sold to end-consumers at filling stations; the inclusion of oilfield service enterprises in the list of system-forming organizations if their annual earnings exceed RUB1 billion; increasing the responsibility of sales organizations to grid companies for paying for electricity transmission services; the temporary non-application of penalties for non-compliance with investment programs by

regulated entities of the electric power industry in 2020 to 2021 and for shortage of capacity delivered by electricity suppliers to the wholesale market caused by the unavailability of generating equipment due to lack of components. Apart from that, the Government of the Russian Federation was instructed to take measures to improve payment discipline of consumers receiving funding from the federal budget and ensure full payment by them for consumed electric and thermal energy and gas. In their turn, the plenipotentiaries of the President of the Russian Federation in the federal districts were instructed to take measures to improve payment discipline of consumers receiving funding from the budget of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and municipal budgets and ensure full payment by them for consumed electric and thermal energy and gas.

Speaking at the said meeting, the Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation noted, in particular, that the situation in the electric power industry was not very good: since the beginning of April, the payment level for electricity was 88%, and 80% for heat energy, as compared to the same period of the previous year. The decrease is mainly observed in the housing and utility sector, where payments have decreased to 63% of the previous year' level. Unfortunately, budgetary organizations have also reduced the payment level by about 10%. In this situation, cash deficiencies occur in the electric power industries, and currently it is important to cover them through loans. Meanwhile, according to the Minister, the coal industry was in rather acceptable state.

And all of this is taking place despite the fact that almost a month before the said Meeting with the President of the Russian Federation, by Order of the Minister of Energy of the Russian Federation of March 26, 2020 No. 248, an operational headquarters of the Russian Ministry of Energy for monitoring the state of the Fuel and Energy Complex organizations was set up in order to coordinate the development of suggestions on ensuring the stability of Russian economy and monitoring the financial and economic state of the Fuel and Energy Complex organizations, including in the context of the spread of the new coronavirus infection COVID-19.

The Headquarters' main tasks include: timely detection of adverse factors affecting the sustainable development of the systemforming Fuel and Energy Complex organizations; preparation of suggestions to the Interdepartmental Commission for Monitoring the Financial and Economic State of Entities of Russian Economy in order to take measures to eliminate the risks detected or minimize their negative impact on the main operational and financial and economic performance indicators of system-forming organizations of the Fuel and Energy Complex. For solving these tasks, the Operational Headquarters must analyze the financial and economic condition of the system-forming organizations of the Fuel and Energy Complex in accordance with the procedure approved by the Ministry of Economic Development of Russia; identify risks that can have a negative impact on the operations of the system-forming organizations of the Fuel and Energy Complex (including through stress-testing of the financial stability of the Fuel and Energy Complex organizations); ensure the approval of a consolidated opinion on the financial and economic state of the system-forming organizations of the Fuel and Energy Complex, as well as of information and analytical materials, including suggestions on the elimination of the identified risks or minimizing their negative impact on the main operational and financial and economic indicators of the system-forming organizations of the Fuel and Energy Complex. It was also stated that the Operational Headquarters must monitor the economic condition of 73 largest Fuel and Energy Complex companies.

The measures described also represent, to a large extent, the "manual control" of Fuel and Energy Complex enterprises during the extreme period of the coronavirus pandemic.

In this regard, the situation was seriously complicated by the unpreparedness of the corporate legal mechanism of Russian justice, which is tasked with an efficient protection of the rights and legitimate interests of the Fuel and Energy Complex enterprises (as well as of all other business structures of national economy), to function in extreme conditions. The thing is that Art. 123 of the Constitution

of the Russian Federation definitely proclaims that the open proceedings in all courts are mandatory (with trials in camera, and absentee proceedings in criminal cases, allowed in cases provided for by a federal law), and that the principle of adversarial proceedings and equality of arms must be observed. These constitutional provisions have also been clearly elaborated in detail in the corresponding procedural codes (which constitute federal laws). But during the period of serious quarantine measures necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic, and the introduction of various restrictive measures, it turned out to be almost impossible to comply with most of the requirements of procedural laws, or "stop" the already initiated proceedings, not to mention depriving our citizens of access to justice. In addition, the structure of the Russian judicial system provided for no authority or official empowered to place the system of justice under an extreme regime of operation. This role was partly assumed by the Presidium of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation and the Presidium of the Council of Judges: their joint resolutions (the first of which was dated March 19, 2020) introduced certain restrictions in the field of legal proceedings. On the one hand, they have not been vested with respective powers provided for by the Constitution of the Russian Federation and federal laws. But, on the other hand, the situation was literally critical at that time, and it would have been illogical for other branches of state power to urgently place the justice mechanism under the regime of extreme legal proceedings. However, this, together with the need to understand the actual implications, is a paramount problem to be discussed in another research.

Thus, one can conclude that legal regulation of public relations (both in Russia and in almost all other countries), including in the field of economics (particularly, the Fuel and Energy Complex), turned out to be practically unprepared to face the coronavirus pandemic, whether in terms of management, personnel, methodology, or (which is a decisive factor) legal regulation. The negative consequences of such situation are still to be identified (which, in turn, will require the development of an appropriate

methodology based on relevant research); but the main question is what we are to do now.

Moreover, it is clear that the current coronavirus pandemic is not something exclusive or not repeated in history (whether in past or future). The 21th century only saw several pandemics (AIDS, SARS, bird flu, swine flu, Ebola...). And, in the past, plague, smallpox, cholera, etc. used to kill off dozens of millions of people. The real reasons for their sharp outbreaks are rather ambiguous: one cannot rule out the possibility that the onset of a number of diseases (turning into epidemics or even pandemics) was caused by meteorites bringing microorganisms (including pathogenic ones) from space to Earth. Those with good imagination can assume that the well-known "Spanish flu" pandemic (the Spanish flu of 1918 to 1920, that had killed about 100 million people) was brought to earthlings by the Tunguska meteorite: it landed on Earth in 1908, and what happened to it further is still unknown (more than a hundred hypotheses have been voiced and substantiated, but actual traces (fragments) of the meteorite have not been found despite persistent search), and it took 10 years to infect "patient zero" and let them get to more populated places...

This means that the 2020 coronavirus pandemic will not be the final item in the above list of pandemics and epidemics (or natural and man-made disasters, whether local, regional, national, or global). And, on a global scale, it is unlikely that it will stay away from our country in the future. So, we need to be ready for this, whether in terms of management, financial and other resources, information, and also morally and psychologically. And, which is very important, in terms of ensuring adequate legal regulation. Consequently, the transformations in legal regulation aimed at solving this problem should be large-scale and radical. We will need to start with a deep revision of the entire corpus of legislative and regulatory acts adopted in our country during the extreme period of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, including identification, and further correction or cancellation, of the acts (individual norms) conflicting with acts of a higher level; evaluation of their effectiveness and, similarly, their correction or cancellation; if possible, identification of gaps in public relations

requiring legal regulation but not regulated for some reason, etc. These efforts will require corresponding and reliable scientific basis.

It is needless to say that during the coronavirus pandemic, all the "green" projects in the field of improving the legal regulation of the Fuel and Energy Complex enterprises' production operations were forcedly blocked; therefore, it is necessary to evaluate total losses in this area, as well as to find ways to recover and ensure the catching up development of "green" legal regulation of "green" energy sector.

After that, three options (at least) for solving the named problem can be suggested, clearly specifying the following aspects: who (what authority), in what time frame, and under what circumstances can (or even must) recognize an epidemic as force majeure and introduce a certain regime of life of a person, society, or state.

The first option is to develop and adopt a universal Federal Legislative Act, which smoothly combines all legal regulation that has had positive outcomes during the 2020 pandemic, in the form of a federal law with the defined lines and paths of its detailed elaboration at regional, municipal, sectoral, departmental, and other levels. This requires a large amount of legislative and policy-drafting work; the approach was outlined during the St Petersburg International Legal Online Forum 9 1/2: Laws of the coronavirus on April 10–12, 2020, where the participants considered the issue of codifying anti-epidemiological norms and requirements into a single system (or, perhaps, even into a single legislative act), maybe even with the general and special parts, with a clear glossary of terms, and an exhaustive description of various legal regimes. [8]

The second option is to develop and adopt generally the same, but more universal federal legislative acts for each (if necessary) sphere of public life of our society, economy sectors, and state regulation and law enforcement. Given the extreme importance of the Fuel and Energy Complex for Russia, when choosing this option, it seems advisable to shape it into a special area of legislative regulation and entrust the Russian Ministry of Energy with its detailed elaboration.

The third option is to include additional sections in the existing federal legislative acts

empowering state and municipal authorities, relevant ministries, and departments to function in extreme conditions, including the right to adopt (within their competence) the necessary legal regulations with immediate effect provided that such regulations contain clearly stated action plans for the officials implementing them during extreme periods taking into account the relevant psychological, economic, social, and other factors.

It may seem that each of the proposed options is a "just in case" suggestion, and that implementing any of them will require a lot of effort and, therefore, is unreasonable. But such a view is just the hope that we'll have a lucky break next time. Maybe we will, and maybe it will happen even several times in a row. But sooner or later, a real force majeure will occur involving losses many times higher than the savings from not implementing the above suggestions.

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