

# Wisely and in all fairness

On 9 June this year, academician Valentin Afanasyevich Koptug would have turned 90. The academician of USSR Academy of sciences was the chairman of SB RAS in the most difficult and stormy years of our country's recent history. Among his achievements is not only preventing through colossal efforts and strain the destruction of the academic science in Siberia but being the first to speak about the necessity and importance of dealing with global problems such as sustainable development of human civilization.

In the words of one of his associates, academician A. P. Derevyanko, the problem of sustainable development is a tangle of immensely complicated issues that were breaking out onto a political plane. This took place during the conflict of separate countries, blocks, and interests. Some countries pursued their interests by putting pressure on the economies and policies of others. Valentin Afanasyevich, unlike some others, saw the importance of this issue: climate and environment change has a global nature" (See the interview of the journal's editorial board V.I. Klistorin with A. P. Derevyanko).

By a fluke of fate, Valentin Afanasyevich happened to be at the outset of two monumentally complex questions – a search for ways of developing the national science in a changing socio-political system and the stable development of human civilization. His answers to those challenges represent to us an indicative example of a real person, scientist, and citizen.

Without exacerbating or aggravating these highly testing problems, V.A. Koptug made every effort to promote step by step the role of science in the society despite destructive socio-economic processes that were quickly becoming irreversible in our country. As for the problems of sustainable development, being a chemistry scientist, Valentin Afanasyevich was fully aware what terrible consequences might spring from a wasteful use of the natural and climatic potential of planet Earth.

In the freewheeling 1990-s, the voice of Valentin Afanasyevich and his collaborators was heard – they adopted a high-level document on the principles of sustainable development<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, it stayed

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<sup>1</sup> The decree of the president of the Russian Federation from 01.04.1996 # 440. On the concept of transition of the Russian Federation to sustainable development. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/9120>

in many ways a formality – an effective solution of real problems is being held back due to the instability of transformational socio-economic processes that irrationally followed the principles of neoliberal economics. One of its consequences is the unquestionable dominance of large monopolies in the economic life of Russia. The business priorities of monopolies have little to do with the interests of the society and even less with its sustainable ecological, social, and economic development. This became very clear during the current year in the course of discussions with the owners of metallurgical plants about the price policy pursued while implementing key infrastructure projects in our country.

It would be interesting to compare the approaches to resolve socio-economic problems of Russia by two outstanding natural scientists – academicians A. D. Sakharov and V.A. Koptyug.

In his time, A.D. Sakharov also grasped the importance of due regard for global agenda while trying to resolve the country's problems. He came to those conclusions through the awareness of the destructive force of (thermo) nuclear weaponry and also through a similarity of the economic production systems in the modern world. As we know, the vision of such similarity brought to life the theory of convergence – or 'joining' of socialism and capitalism into a single system with best features of both. A prominent proponent of this theory, the famous American economist J.K. Galbraith put it this way: "I came to the conclusion about broad commonality of the industrial systems of the socialist and non-socialist worlds. There is no real difference between a control from capitalist owners and that from the state... the common thing between large enterprises in both systems is the inevitable collective management and decision making based on the knowledge of many participants-experts"<sup>2</sup>.

The profound understanding of the laws of creation led both scientists to grasping the unity and integrality of the world. Nevertheless, their ways of reaching the connection to practice were quite different. Andrei Dmitrievich, having no receptive audience, concentrated his individual efforts on attracting public attention in our country to the denoted problems. Valentin Afanasyevich was

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<sup>2</sup> The decree of the president of the Russian Federation from 01.04.1996 # 440. On the concept of transition of the Russian Federation to sustainable development. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/9120>

capable to promote the global agenda of sustainable development in the practical activity of the renewed Russian state.

Unfortunately (as all too often happened in our national history), many ideas and approaches that could facilitate implementation of sustainable development in Russia were never destined to come true. The range of unresolved problems remains too vast – from the rates of alternative power development to the exercisable rights of the Northern indigenous peoples.

In the latter case, same as with the principles of sustainable development, there is a full-blown regulatory framework<sup>3</sup>, the norms of which are, alas, unsolicited. This gives rise to situations similar to the one discussed on the pages of this issue (the paper by E. V. Potravina), namely: “an ethnological expert conclusion about the impact of such an emergency needs to be considered through the system of protecting the lawful rights of small peoples, compensating those indigenous communities the incurred damage and lost future profits”. We think such an expert conclusion is of exceptional nature and may not be regarded as the basis for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples of the North as applied to their traditional way of life.

The situation is largely analogous with opportunities for large city inhabitants to shape options of moving forward. In the case of Krasnoyarsk “...without steps, which are sensible and understandable for inhabitants, to remedy the existing state of affairs one can hardly expect that young people would wish to stay living in places of their birth even with good quality and high-paying jobs available (the paper by A. I. Pyzhev, R. A. Sharafutdinov and E. V. Zander).

Meanwhile, as the world moves on – the processes of another energy transition consolidate although their irreversible nature has to overcome the resistance of understanding, to say nothing of the reaction to coming changes. We are talking here not only about low-carbon energy industry and higher attention to problems of environmental protection but also about novel approaches to economic agents' interaction, transborder trade and cooperation, another human role – that of bringing new knowledge and initiatives.

Thus, in the case of hydrogen economy it is “the need to take long-term high-price investment decisions in a situation when

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<sup>3</sup> Kryazhkov V. A. Indigenous small-numbered peoples in the Russian law. M.: Norma, 2010. 560 p.

objective cost estimates concerning the prospects of separate projects and the industry in general are practically impossible” (the paper by S. Yu. Kovalev and I. Yu. Blum). Validating and taking such decisions takes ‘a broad range of participating experts’ and the main criterion in selection of such alternatives is other than the one of high marginal returns.

Various countries are following the route of energy transition – the global ecological and low-carbon agenda. The most forward in this respect are the countries of Western Europe. This is chiefly due to the institutions of civil society that are actively participating in all the stages of decision preparation and implementation (see the paper by N. N. Pusenkova). Another testimony of the same is a decision taken on May 26 by the Hague district court (the Netherlands) requiring that Royal Dutch Shell “bring its total CO2 emissions of all the Shell group companies at least 45% down by 2030 versus 2019 through a corresponding corporate policy of Shell”<sup>4</sup>. There is another course of events that is taking place in the USA – J. Biden’s administration has put on hold for an indefinite time all of the oil and gas projects in the Arctic<sup>5</sup>.

Under the circumstances, Russia is facing a difficult choice that should be done wisely and in all fairness. On the one hand, – working out one’s own rational agenda to the global challenges, on the other – coordinating one’s actions with one’s conscience – the responsibility for the living conditions of current and future generations of Russian people. Our outstanding academicians demonstrated us how to do this.

Editor in chief of ‘ECO’



V.A. KRYUKOV

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<sup>4</sup> Konoplianik A. A. Legal precedent Shell // Vedomosti. 2021. 6 июня.

URL: [https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2021/06/09/873466-sudebnii-pretседent-shell?utm\\_campaign=newspaper\\_9\\_6\\_2021&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=vedomosti%3Futm\\_campaign%3Dnewspaper\\_9\\_6\\_2021&utm\\_source=vedomosti](https://www.vedomosti.ru/opinion/articles/2021/06/09/873466-sudebnii-pretседent-shell?utm_campaign=newspaper_9_6_2021&utm_medium=email&utm_source=vedomosti%3Futm_campaign%3Dnewspaper_9_6_2021&utm_source=vedomosti)

<sup>5</sup> Alan Kovski. Biden administration stalls ANWR oil work, possibly for years. Jun 2nd, 2021 [https://www.ogj.com/general-interest/government/article/14204477/biden-administration-stalls-anwr-oil-work-possibly-for-years?utm\\_source=OGJ+Daily&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=CPS210602040&o\\_eid=3445H6683990G1B&rdx.ident%5Bpull%5D=omeda%7C3445H6683990G1B&oly\\_enc\\_id=3445H6683990G1B](https://www.ogj.com/general-interest/government/article/14204477/biden-administration-stalls-anwr-oil-work-possibly-for-years?utm_source=OGJ+Daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CPS210602040&o_eid=3445H6683990G1B&rdx.ident%5Bpull%5D=omeda%7C3445H6683990G1B&oly_enc_id=3445H6683990G1B)