

The Chernobyl Disaster: Reflection after 25 Years

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1. The adverse technogenic impact of industrial accidents that have gripped the world in recent decades definitely testifies to the problem-ridden character of contemporary economic and technological development. This is especially evident on the example of nuclear industry, which proved to be a source of dangerous pollution in case of potential (and real) catastrophes, as recently borne out by the Fukushima disaster. In this regard, the issues of Chernobyl disaster once again become the part of the discourse centered on the analysis of global nuclear industry problems. Likewise, current situation in Ukraine demands deeper investigation of the problems of technological development, as the gradual decay of industrial infrastructure inherited from the period of the USSR presents ever greater threat to the prospects of the nation's further development. Therefore the examination of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe is of a great importance for the purpose of more complex understanding of the situation of modern Ukraine.

2. The Chernobyl disaster has had significant repercussions for the future development of Ukraine as an independent nation and as a part of European and Eurasian regions. According to estimates provided by Fairie & Sumner (2006), the approximate Cs-137 dose levels for the territories of Ukraine affected by the Chernobyl disaster average at 0.4 mSv per year, which is far higher than the U.S. minimum radiation clean-up level of 0.15 mSv (Fairie & Summers, 2006, p. 39). Together with other types of pollution / contamination, this creates a wide range of problems for the health of Ukrainian population, inhibiting its stable and harmonious growth and development. The burden faced by the state budget due to the health issues of the population affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe is considerable: for instance, in the fiscal year of 2010 alone the state expenses for health treatment of the persons affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe amounted to 382.9 million hryvnas (8 Ukrainian hryvnas equals to 1 US \$), while indemnities for damages caused by the Chernobyl events that were paid to the laid-off employees that were victims thereof were close to 46.62 million hryvnas (Law of Ukraine "On State Budget of Ukraine for the year of 2010", 2009). This factor possesses a specific political dimension as well.

3. Recent conflicts between persons entitled to state social benefits due to their participation in rescue and safety operations after the Chernobyl events (the so-called '*Chernobyltsi*') and the national authorities underscore the political nature of this problem. The numerous scuffles between the *Chernobyltsi* and the law enforcement agents indicate that the socio-political consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe are of utmost importance for the political life of the nation. Diverse

political forces were keen to exploit the discontent of the *Chernobyltsi* with the national government's austerity measures, thus bringing the factor of political tensions into equation. This fact demonstrates that the Chernobyl catastrophe continues to exert a significant impact upon social life in Ukraine. The active participation of the strata of Ukrainian society which were directly affected by the 1986 events signifies the necessity for Ukrainian politicians to take the interests of the *Chernobyltsi* into account while planning and executing the current structural reform programmes.

3. The general demographic consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe are likewise substantial. According to the report submitted by Ukraine's Ministry for Emergency Situations and the Issues of Population Protection from the Effects of the Chernobyl Catastrophe in 2005, about 3.213 million people were designated the status of affected by the Chernobyl disaster. More than 19,000 families were entitled to benefits due to the loss of bread-earner in 2006 (Ministry for Emergency Situations and the Issues of Population Protection from the Effects of the Chernobyl Catastrophe, 2006, p.56). Such figures demonstrate that the population of Ukraine remains greatly affected by the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

3. The foreign policy dimensions of the Chernobyl crisis are similarly significant. On the one hand, the Ukrainian State had repeatedly appealed for foreign aid to its Western partners for the purposes of ameliorating the effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe. As recently as April 2011, Ukraine received €110 million from the European Union as a part of continuing aid in this regard (The Nuclear N-Former, 2011). Still, the exact benefits derived from the foreign aid received by Ukraine from foreign donors are questionable, because the lack of transparency in this field reportedly led to many instances of official graft that have compromised the very project of international efforts to alleviate the Chernobyl situation in the eyes of many commentators and decision makers.

4. On the other hand, the Chernobyl disaster made the world more aware of the dangers presented by potential malfunctioning of nuclear industry objects. It is indicative that, while in 1979, at the peak of the growth of global nuclear industry, 233 reactors were being constructed, in 2011 mere 64 reactors were listed in this category by the International Atomic Energy Agency (Schneider, Froggatt, & Thomas, 2011, p.7). Although the direct proofs of such statement are absent, it may be claimed that the Chernobyl disaster contributed to the growing awareness of environmental repercussions of unchecked development of nuclear industry. This would mean that the tragic experience of Chernobyl (since the 26th of April 1986) was not lost to the following generations.

5. Within the context of Ukraine, the Chernobyl problem may be construed as an integral part of the general picture of environmental issues that were raised by the experience of the 1990s to 2000s. The decay of industrial infrastructure that became a continuous feature of life in modern Ukraine has a vastly negative impact on the general situation in the national economy and social fabric. Therefore the future development of Ukraine strongly depends upon overcoming of this problem.

References

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