

KHIMKI FOREST IN THE AGENDA OF FRENCH PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO MOSCOW

February 28, 2013 – leader of the Movement to Defend Khimki Forest Evgenia Chirikova participated in a meeting of French President Francois Hollande with Russian public figures.

Mrs. Chirikova told Mr. Hollande about the very strange behavior of French company Vinci in Russia. Instead of attracting foreign investments into the project of Moscow – St. Petersburg motorway (as it was specified in the concession contract), Vinci had contributed to the creation of a joint venture with very odd chains of tax-haven companies, apparently to the benefit of oligarch Arkady Rotenberg, a friend of Putin, as well as some other Russian billionaires. As a result, the construction is going mainly at the expense of Russian taxpayers, state banks and the pension fund rather than foreign investments. Nevertheless, the profit from the project (which already exists, though the motorway is far from being finished) goes to French company Vinci and its Russian partners. Evgenia Chirikova told the President of France that realization of the motorway project went on with the use of violence against environmental activists, massive and unnecessary destruction of environment. She revealed the results of a study of Vinci's activities on construction of Moscow – St. Petersburg motorway pointing out possible corruption interests behind the project.

In the end of her speech, Mrs. Chirikova expressed hope that President Hollande would convince Vinci to stop its participation in the corruption-ridden, human rights abusive and destructive for living nature motorway project through the Khimki Forest.

Hollande listened to Chirikova with attention and said that he had discussed the project of Moscow – St. Petersburg motorway with President Putin. Mr. Hollande thanked for information on Vinci as important and new for him. And he promised to talk to the management of Vinci.

Mrs. Chirikova also described the situation with human rights and environment in Russia on the whole as “very alarming”. Repressions are growing throughout Russia, and environmentalists often become its subjects: criminal actions are brought against them; they are subjected to fines and arrests. Project Ekouznic (Eco-Prisoner) is set up for the defense of nature defenders. At present, Suren Gazaryan and Tatyana Pavlova are acknowledged as ecological prisoners. There is hope that the statute of eco-prisoner will become international, because the problem of environmentalists' persecution exists in many countries. This

statute enables to draw attention to repression against ecological activists. Often such attention is enough to stop repressions. Mrs. Chirikova expressed hope that France would back the efforts of Russian civil society to stop repressions against environmental activists in Russia.