

**Sustainable Development and Actors of Regional Environmental Governance:
Eurasia at the Crossroads**

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Sustainable Development and Actors of Regional Environmental Governance: Eurasia at the Crossroads

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Introduction

The year 2022 has witnessed highly turbulent changes in all aspects of world politics and socioeconomic development, directly affecting global environmental politics and posing new challenges to the sustainable development agenda.^{Footnote¹} This concluding essay places the articles of this special issue into this new dynamic global context, accounting for the rising importance of new actors and changes in regional environmental governance in Eurasia.

How has the international security crisis triggered by the Russo-Ukrainian war affected sustainable development in Eurasia? What are the implications and lessons (if any) for environmental regional governance? It is safe to suggest that many issues—including public commitments and perceptions, the priorities of governments around the world, an actual increase in the risk of nuclear destruction, the ecological consequences of the war, the energy crisis in Europe, among other factors—have all modified the state of the pre-war environmental agenda. Two new articles in this special issue, by Lada Kochtcheeva (^{Citation2021}) and Eva-Marie Dubuisson (^{Citation2020}), have been welcome additions to the collection, shedding ample light on the state of sustainable development prior to the events of 2022 and on the importance of Eurasia in the context of regional environmental governance.^{Footnote²} Moreover, both articles allow us to make tentative predictions regarding the future prospects of environmental politics, public environmentalism, and the role of regional international organizations (IOs). Kochtcheeva (^{Citation2021}) looks at the importance of international influence in shaping Russia's stance in global environmental politics and the importance of global image-building for the Russian government before 2022. Among other things, she argues that international influence has been one of the most crucial factors in making Russia's government more pro-environmental. Similarly, Dubuisson (^{Citation2020}) looks into the nexus of international influence between the United Nations (UN), the Kazakh government, and people in Kazakhstan. Both papers are interconnected through their focus on the impact of international influence on the environmental agenda of non-democratic states. Both studies emphasize the importance of international engagement in shaping the environmental agenda in Russia and Kazakhstan. To extend their line of argument, we also ponder the consequences of international isolation and exclusion for the future prospects of sustainable development in Eurasia and beyond.

In what follows, we will dive into details regarding the importance of people in autocratic regional environmental governance, as well as the importance of international influence on autocracies' stance in sustainable development. How can people and international engagement modify autocratic environmental regionalism (AER)? What changes are taking

place in regard to environmental regionalism in Eurasia? These questions have become highly important to understand the perspectives of cooperation on sustainable development in Eurasia.

International (Dis-)engagement and Image-Building

International influence and engagement have been the key triggers, not only in shaping the environmental standing of post-Communist states—including huge energy exporters such as Russia and Kazakhstan (Dubuisson Citation2020; Kochtcheeva Citation2021)—but also in the diffusion of democratic liberal values. In fact, the literature has often debated the interconnection between democracy and the sustainable development agenda (e.g. Bättig and Bernauer Citation2009; Burnell Citation2012; Eckersley Citation2020; Hobson Citation2012; Kneuer Citation2012; Obydenkova Citation2022c; Obydenkova and Salahodjaev Citation2017). Another set of literature points to the importance of people and of IOs, historical legacies, institutional trust, and public attitudes in the diffusion of democracy and/or the environmental agenda (Arpino and Obydenkova Citation2020; Fredriksson and Neumayer Citation2013; Hobson Citation2012; Huber Citation2020). For example, the role of the European Union (EU), the UN, climate forums, and multilateral development banks in advancing sustainable development in the post-Communist region has been widely discussed in the literature as well as in this special issue (Obydenkova, Vieira, and Tosun Citation2021; Buzogány Citation2022; Dalmer Citation2021; Djalilov and Hartwell Citation2021; Gutner Citation2002; Nazarov and Obydenkova Citation2021). In sum, the literature has addressed multiple aspects of the interconnection between political regimes and the environment and of the influence of a variety of international actors (e.g. the EU, the UN, banks) on democratization and/or advancing the sustainable development agenda (e.g. Shyrokykh Citation2021; Mišić and Obydenkova Citation2021; Tosun and Shyrokykh Citation2021; Obydenkova Citation2022b; Fredriksson and Mohanty Citation2021). In what follows, we will look more closely at the role of people and international image-building in the cases of Russia and Kazakhstan within the IO–democratization–sustainable development nexus. How do people matter, and why? What is the role of international engagement? And how can these questions be reconsidered post-2022?

Both Russia and Kazakhstan have been motivated by the need to build their image as benevolent green actors in global environmental politics. Russia is “the world’s largest energy exporter by a wide margin” (Overland Citation2022, 2). Kazakhstan is one of the significant exporters of energy, although far behind Russia. Yet, Kochtcheeva’s study (Citation2021) on the role of external actors in shaping Russia’s environmental stance echoes the case of Kazakhstan, which has been influenced by the UN.

The environmental commitments of some—if not all—post-Communist states and non-democratic regional organizations (on NDROs, see Hartwell Citation2021; Libman and Obydenkova Citation2013; Citation2018b) have been described as cosmetic, superficial, or purely rhetorical (e.g. Ambrosio, Hall, and Obydenkova Citation2021; Dubuisson Citation2020; Hall, Lenz, and Obydenkova Citation2021). For example, the study by Agostinis and Urdinez (Citation2021) in this special issue demonstrates how China has attempted to create a “green image” within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while prioritizing investment in the extraction fossil energy infrastructure of Central Asian member-states of the SCO. Yet, even the rhetorical environmental agenda has emerged under the influence of major international actors such as the UN, the EU, and

the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) (e.g. Shyrokykh Citation2021; Buzogány Citation2022; Gutner Citation2002). The UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the EBRD have triggered a number of changes in the environmental agendas of post-Soviet states, including Russia and Kazakhstan, but also arguably in China (Ambrosio, Hall, and Obydenkova Citation2021; Obydenkova, Vieira, and Tosun Citation2021; Dubuisson Citation2020; Hall, Lenz, and Obydenkova Citation2021). The EBRD, for example, has been a role-model for newly emerging regional development banks, such as the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) led by Russia or the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank initiated by China (e.g. Ambrosio, Hall, and Obydenkova Citation2021; Hall, Lenz, and Obydenkova Citation2021). This imitation can also be viewed as a diffusion of values through a variety of international contacts, from foreign trade to participation in regional organizations (e.g. Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova Citation2016a). Even if this imitation remains rhetorical for governments, environmental institutional commitments have inspired public pro-environmental protests, thus advancing the environmental agenda (as happened in the case of Kazakhstan: Dubuisson Citation2020). Therefore, despite being arguably superficial, regional environmental governance in Eurasia has been shaped through international engagement.

International influence has been a crucial factor for autocracies to be more pro-environmental in policymaking, but also to empower their people to protest and to be heard within environmental conflict management (Dubuisson Citation2020; Hanaček and Martin-Alhier Citation2021). Kochtcheeva (Citation2021) highlights Russia's international engagement and image-building as crucial triggers in development of an agenda of sustainability. Only recently (in 2019), Vladimir Putin made statements supporting efforts to slow down the melting of the permafrost in the Arctic and eastern Siberia (Kochtcheeva Citation2021, 6). Kochtcheeva cites a number of leading politicians on the importance of being *fully involved in the international context* to combine efforts in decreasing greenhouse gas emissions and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new green technologies and know-how (Citation2021, 6). The author insightfully notes that Russia has tried "to establish itself as an important global player and *improve its image internationally*" (8; italics are mine). Prior to 2022, participation in the international climate regime and involvement in global-level climate forums had led to more "opportunities for the Russian government" and to consolidating international cooperation while improving Russia's image as a global "green" actor (Kochtcheeva Citation2021, 11). The latter argument is in line with Tosun and Mišić's (Citation2021) analysis of the motivation of post-Communist states to participate in global forums on climate action, which they argue was triggered by the example of other states and by gaining access to knowledge.

Moreover, membership in regional clubs of democracies, such as the Arctic Council (AC), and contacts with the EBRD motivated the Russian government to keep its environmental discourse and actions running (e.g. Ambrosio, Hall, and Obydenkova Citation2021; Lavelle Citation2021). Though those commitments and policies have been called superficial (e.g., Ambrosio, Hall, and Obydenkova Citation2021), they still formed part of debates and discussion, making the government more accountable on environmental policy decision-making—both to the people (e.g. through the use of social media) *and* to the international community (through membership in, for example, the AC).

As the contributions to this special issue have demonstrated, international influence and international engagement play a crucial role in forming governmental stances on the environmental agenda *and* in bottom-up environmental movements and protests.

What happens when international engagement is taken out of the equation? What happens when a country's international image has been destroyed by the events of 2022? The consequences of eliminating any form of engagement with the West are destructive for many aspects related to supporting civil society, the diffusion of democratic and environmental values, and for the need to imitate the environmental stance of the West.

Public Environmentalism and Civil Society: How Do People Matter?

People—together with states, IOs and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, and industries—are important actors in environmental governance (e.g. Klinke Citation2012; Tysiachniouk, Korkina, and Petrov Citation2021). Even within a non-democratic context, people matter through the organization of environmental movements, protests, and environmental commitments at the individual level, resulting in certain public values and behaviors (e.g. Demchuk et al. Citation2021; Hanaček and Martinez-Alier Citation2021). Strikingly, public environmental movements may demonstrate “substantial similarities” even under radically different political regimes—for example, in the United States and in Russia (Tysiachniouk, Korkina, and Petrov Citation2021, 895). As Tysiachniouk and colleagues have demonstrated, while public behavior is similar across borders in the United States and in Russia, the response of national and regional actors is different. Moreover, people are associated with the diffusion of (environmental and democratic) values and principles above and beyond state borders. In the words of Tysiachniouk et al., US and Russian “Indigenous-led movements were also able to amplify their agendas and transfer strategic alliances to other places and issues” (Citation2021, 895). In sum, people should not be associated with certain political regimes or with governmental actions, even more so in the case of manipulated electoral results when people remain unrepresented (e.g. Myagkov and Ordeshook Citation2008; Oates Citation2000; Stavrakis Citation1996; Tkacheva and Turchenko Citation2022).

In fact, one positive thing we have learned from the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has been about the importance of people in authoritarian states. Despite state prosecution, people in Russia have protested against the government on the streets and on social media (e.g. the anti-corruption movement by Aleksei Navalny: Dollbaum Citation2020; Dollbaum and Semenov Citation2022; Gel'man Citation2020; Shomova Citation2022). Dollbaum and Semenov (Citation2022) demonstrate the importance of social media as part of the anti-government movement to opposition campaign supporters of Aleksei Navalny. Social media became the main tool for opposition and public movements well before the dramatic events of 2022. Scholars have analyzed social media such as Twitter, VKontakte, and Facebook as available tools for public protests, but also as a means used by government and governmental organizations to augment their public support and legitimacy (Dollbaum Citation2021; Hall, Lenz, and Obydenkova Citation2021). People have protested and opposed the government in Belarus and in Russia, arguing that people must not be associated with those in power and that politicians do not represent either the will of people or their electoral choice (e.g. Oates Citation2000; Stavrakis Citation1996). A specific example is the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021, Dmitry Muratov, Russian editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, for “efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace”Footnote³ Muratov sold his Nobel golden medal at auction to support Ukrainian child refugees in 2022 (e.g. Harding Citation2022).Footnote⁴ Networks of Russians have coordinated giving help to Ukrainians displaced into Russia by the war by helping them leave Russia for the EU (instead of

being displaced further by Russian authorities into Siberia and other remote regions) (e.g. Ivanova Citation2022; Open Democracy Citation2022; Chkhikvishvili Citation2022; Walsh and Zalenskaia Citation2022). Moreover, Russians living in other countries have opened their doors to refugees from Ukraine, helping them to settle abroad (e.g. Wasura Citation2022). There are countless examples of Russians supporting Ukrainians and fighting against Putin's government—some of them are well known and famous (as in the case of Muratov), while other true heroes have remained in the shadows. Known or not, we have learned about the importance of people and of making a clear distinction between the actions of a people and the actions of a government. The same holds true for the role and impact of people involved in environmental movements via social media, mass media, or public protests over environmental conflicts, in changing governmental anti-environmental policies at least to some extent (Dubuisson Citation2020; Hanaček and Martinez-Alier Citation2021); or for environmental scholars studying global warming in the Arctic who had previously been sponsored by Germany, but who were cut off from all research funding due to Western sanctions and who, *despite this*, have kept their scientific work running under harsh climatic conditions and lack of salaries (Reuters Citation2022).

Public resistance to a government's policies in general and to its exploitation of the environment in particular is in line with modern public protests, socioenvironmental activism, and bottom-up movements (Martinez-Alier et al. Citation2016). The roles of society and of people have become increasingly important over the last years. Therefore, it is not surprising that public environmental protests and movements have attracted close attention from scholars, with special emphasis on the discourse and the outcomes of protests (on discourse analysis, see Dubuisson Citation2020; Poberezhskaya and Bychkova Citation2021). In line with this academic focus, Dubuisson (Citation2020) looks into the importance of people in terms of mass protests over environmental protection in Kazakhstan, as well as their efficient outcomes. Using discourse analysis, Dubuisson (Citation2020) demonstrates that these protests, by appealing to the legal frameworks of the UN *and* to the historical legacies of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), have led the government to revoke policies affecting land use and natural resources management.

The historical legacies of the USSR have been pronounced across all former Soviet republics (e.g. Iman, Nazarov, and Obydenkova Citation2022; Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova Citation2016b; Libman and Obydenkova Citation2020; Citation2021; Nazarov and Obydenkova Citation2022). Kazakhstan is an example of the influence of historical legacies in terms of the state's misuse and exploitation of lands (Dubuisson Citation2020); another legacy is the nuclear chain created during the Soviet Union (Hanaček and Martinez-Alier Citation2021). Yet, environmental protests were held even under the USSR. The public anti-nuclear movement began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as a result of which a few projects related to environmental conflicts were suspended (Dubuisson Citation2020; Hanaček and Martinez-Alier Citation2021). The importance of discourse at a state level has also been demonstrated by Poberezhskaya and Bychkova (Citation2021) through an analysis of Kazakhstan's legal documents and interviews. Along with other studies, the authors highlight the importance of building and maintaining the image of Kazakhstan as a benevolent green actor for sustainable development, making it attractive for international investment as well as for the national population Poberezhskaya and Bychkova (Citation2021). Thus, in the case of Kazakhstan, the combination of international influence, image-building, and civil society have been three interdependent factors affecting environmental choices at the governmental level.

This nexus between international influence, government, and people also applies (or used to apply before 2022) to Russia's governmental stance on sustainable development and the involvement of people in environmental governance, for example in the case of deforestation (Libman and Obydenkova Citation2014; Ostrom Citation1990). Because international influence is associated not only with the diffusion of environmental values but also with the diffusion of democracy, Russia imposed a new law on "foreign agents" in 2020. Anna Kireeva (Citation2020) states that "Russia's law on 'foreign agents' has put an undue burden on the country's environmentalists, hampering the addressing [of] myriad ecological problems." Since 2022, governmental measures against social and mass media and access to information have become stricter than ever in Russia. Prior to 2022, international influence was equally important in influencing governmental decisions on the environmental agenda and in supporting public environmentalism and inspiring environmental movements. The new period that started in 2022 can be described as international disengagement.

Conclusion: At the Crossroads

Contributions to this special issue are split broadly between, first, a set of articles focusing on autocracy-led regional organizations and their environmental agendas, with attention to the role of Russia, China, and Kazakhstan (e.g. the SCO, the EDB, and the Eurasian Economic Union). The second set of studies focuses on the regional organizations composed of democracies and their role in advancing sustainable development goals (e.g. the EU, the EBRD, and the AC), as well as on global actors (e.g. climate forums and the UN). Based on this dichotomous approach and on newly emerging literature on authoritarian regionalism, the introduction to this special issue identifies "autocratic environmental regionalism" (AER) and "democratic environmental regionalism" (DER) (see Obydenkova Citation2022a). The implications of AER and DER for sustainable development in Eurasia are analyzed throughout the articles. One of the main findings in the articles is the significant influence of DER and of international actors (e.g. the UN and global forums on climate action) on shaping and advancing the sustainable development agenda in post-Communist Eurasia and China. DER has played a crucial role in the diffusion of the environmental agenda across borders through multiple ways of international engagement.

This concluding essay looked at the importance of *international engagement* with democracies in terms of image-building for national leaders of non-democratic states. This engagement and international influence has been crucial not only for advancing the sustainable development agenda, but also for supporting public environmental movements, civil society, and the diffusion of democracy (Dubuisson Citation2020; Kochtcheeva Citation2021; Lankina, Libman, and Obydenkova Citation2016a; Lavelle Citation2021).Footnote⁵ For example, Kathryn Lavelle (Citation2021) demonstrates how Russia's membership of the AC led it to embrace at least some of the environmental concerns of other AC member-states, such as Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the United States, Canada, Iceland, and Finland. In the aftermath of the invasion in Ukraine in 2022, the AC has ceased functioning for now. Member-states jointly declared they would not participate in AC meetings (for example the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark Citation2022), thus eliminating any engagement with Russia and, by default, eliminating any possible influence through this engagement. In a similar way, Western sanctions have led

to the further political, economic, and scientific isolation of Russia. While this is an understandable response to the war in Ukraine, the sudden switch from international engagement to disengagement has triggered, among other issues, radical change for sustainable development at a global level.

First, *at the national governmental level*, sustainable development is no longer discussed or considered in any way in Russia. The fact that sanctions prevent ongoing and future prospects for advancing sustainable development has already been recognized in the academic literature. Cirone and Urpelainen (Citation2013) demonstrate how international sanctions in general damage environmental cooperation at the international and global levels. The disappearance of the environmental agenda in Russian government policy looks like a long-term consequence of international isolation.

In terms of the share in global CO₂ emissions, Russia occupied the fourth highest place after China, the United States, and India in 2017 (see, for example Statistics Citation2019, 5). Therefore, Russia's involvement in achieving global sustainable development goals (such as, for example, decrease of emissions) is crucial (Overland Citation2022, 4). Indra Overland has insightfully pointed out that, "if Russia seeks to break out of isolation at some point in the future, climate policy could be one of the very few areas where Ukraine's supporters *might* be willing to have any contact with Russia at all" (Citation2022, 4). In the words of Alexandra E. Cirone and Johannes Urpelainen, "since trade sanctions reduce the cost of unilateral policy, they prevent environmentally inclined countries from credibly threatening to suspend cooperation if other countries defect" (309).

Confirming this theoretical prediction, in the aftermath of the sanctions and facing pressure from business organizations, Russia has lifted environmental preconditions allowing businesses to launch massive construction projects in Specially Protected Natural Territories (OOPT), which account for over 12 percent of the Russian landmass (Klean Industries Citation2022). Unleashing business construction across Russia has been meant to help counteract the consequences of the sanctions, to support business and economic development.^{Footnote⁶} This change in governmental policies is concerning not only because unleashing major construction may be destructive for the environment but also for decreasing (if not eliminating) environmental audit per se. The situation is alarming also because of the *quality* of construction, equipment, and ecological consequences, especially in the oil and gas industries, but also in other industries. For example, Tatiana Kondratenko (Citation2021) provides astonishing facts on "an oil leak occurring somewhere in the country almost *every half hour*, Russia records many more spills than other oil-rich states" (italics are mine).^{Footnote⁷} Oil leaks have sadly become routine, contaminating rivers, fisheries, and lakes, and contributing to forest depletion and forest fires (Kondratenko Citation2021). Lifting the existing environmental audit as a response to sanctions will significantly amplify the damage, not only within Russia, but also well beyond. According to data collected by the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 (FRA 2020) of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, 54 percent of the global forest is located in only five states, with Russia controlling 20 percent of overall forest (followed by 12 percent in Brazil, 9 percent in Canada, 8 percent in the United States, and 5 percent in China).^{Footnote⁸} International engagement and influence are critical for bottom-up environmentalists and civil society to protect their homelands, and it has been a crucial factor in limiting and containing environmental destruction at the national level for the sake of "image-building." Now this international leverage and pressure is gone, with immediate and severe consequences for advancing environmental destruction at a more rapid pace than ever before.

This national ecological degradation relates directly to the consolidation of non-democratic regional organizations (NDROs) and their environmental agendas, which are analyzed in this special issue. As some of these studies have argued, these actors are mainly involved in construction and trade (e.g., Agostinis and Urdinez Citation2021). Now, with the easing or possibly the elimination of any environmental monitoring and control in Russia, construction within and across NDRO member-states will increase, with significant ecological consequences in its wake.

Second, *environmental movements have become associated with “foreign agents”* (Kireeva Citation2020) during the pandemic of 2020. Environmental NGOs “were largely financed by grants from international donors who were funding Russia’s fledgling civil society with a view to supporting the larger goal of democratization” (Plantan Citation2020, 13). The limited remaining external support for environmental movements has vanished in the aftermath of the sanctions.

Third, *joint international scientific projects on the most urgent environmental issues, such as global warming, have also been stopped due to the sanctions* (e.g. projects on climate change in the Arctic environment of Siberia).Footnote⁹ Two-thirds of the Arctic permafrost is located in Russia, and data from this region are acknowledged to be absolutely indispensable to understanding of and dealing with global warming (Reuters Citation2022).Footnote¹⁰

Fourth, another paradox that has emerged in the aftermath of the events of 2022 relates to *the accessibility of oil and gas from Russia in the EU*. With supplies of oil and gas from Russia in question (both as part of the sanctions but also as part of Russia’s response to those sanctions, e.g. the demand to pay for energy in local Russian currency), the interest in clean alternative energy has increased in Europe and beyond. Paradoxically, this *demand for renewable energy* requires augmenting the purchase of key materials for clean technologies that used to come from Russia, but also from Kazakhstan and China (Overland Citation2022, 2). As the literature on authoritarian regionalism has indicated, SCO membership has been crucial for the development of deep economic and political ties between Kazakhstan and China, along with the development of trust and loyalty (Agostinis and Urdinez Citation2021; Izotov and Obydenkova Citation2021; Libman and Obydenkova Citation2018a). Therefore, doubts about the availability of Kazakh materials necessary for clean-energy technologies in the West are well grounded. It is highly unlikely that Kazakhstan will risk its close, century-long economic and political ties with Russia in exchange for short-run collaboration and trade with Western partners. Further, another source of alternative energy is nuclear power, which depends entirely on access to the uranium market where both Russia and China are (or were) the leading exporters (Overland et al. Citation2019, Citation2022).

Fifth, another radical change in environmental regional governance involves the increased importance of China as a leading partner for Russia and most Central Asian states. According to the findings of Agostinis and Urdinez (Citation2021), China continues to play as part of two teams, purchasing cheap oil and gas from Russia but also retaining its leadership as a renewable energy exporter (e.g. as a global supplier of almost 70 percent of all solar panels: Overland Citation2022, 2). This new context creates a paradox in terms of the need to expand clean-energy technologies to decrease dependence on fossil energy exports from Russia, vis-à-vis the increasing dependence on access to much-needed materials for those clean technologies and uranium located in Russia, Kazakhstan, and China.Footnote¹¹

This list of the devastating consequences that have been unfolding since the winter of 2021–2022 keeps on growing. It is safe to say that bilateral negotiations at the cross-state level have failed. There is a hope that regional organizations will provide a more favorable environment and better results for at least some of the most urgent sustainable development issues. The articles in this special issue have demonstrated the critical importance of continuous international engagement for all levels of environmental agenda-setting and implementation—at a national level; at a public level (through public environmentalism, movements, and protests); at the academic level (e.g. by continuing to run joint scientific projects regarding, for example, the Arctic permafrost); and at the multilateral and cross-national levels (through the diffusion of environmental values in and across regional organizations). The issues, concerns, and challenges analyzed and discussed in this collection of articles are more important than ever for the global sustainable development agenda in the short-term and long-term perspectives.

Notes

1. Conclusion of Special Issue “Sustainable Development, Regional Governance, and International Organizations: Implications for Post-Communism.” I am grateful to the Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Uppsala University (Sweden) for supporting this research. All opinions expressed in this article and possible errors are my own sole responsibility.

2. On the rising importance of the region and of the regional dimension in environmental governance, see, for example, Ken Conca (Citation2012).

3. See, for example, The Nobel Prize (Citation2021). The award was shared with Maria Ressa: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2021/muratov/facts/>.

4. See, for example, Harding (Citation2022) in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/21/nobel-peace-prize-auctioned-by-russian-journalist-dmitry-muratov-fetches-record-1035m> and The Nobel Prize 2021. Facts.

5. Previous studies have discussed the nexus between democracy, democratization, the diffusion of climate change policies, and the advancing environmental agenda (e.g. Kneuer Citation2012; Klinke Citation2012; Hobson Citation2012).

6. Yulia Davydova, a spokesperson for the Russian branch of the environmental group Greenpeace, points out that the new law allows building highways and pipelines crossing OOPT and that these building projects will not be subject to environmental review (as they used to be before the sanctions). Dmitry Gorshkov, the head of the World Wildlife Fund, elaborates further: “After the law is implemented, it will still seriously raise the risks of a technogenic impact inside OOPTs.”

7. Greenpeace Russia campaign director Vladimir Chuprov states that oil companies could always “get away from the financial responsibilities of oil spills and the social and environmental consequences.” Shockingly, even before the environmental review was lifted as a response to sanctions, oil leaks broke global records as oil companies “operate outside of the legal framework” (cited in Kondratenko Citation2021).

8. Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 (FRA 2020): [https://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/2020/en/#:~:text=For-ests%20around%20the%20world&text=More%20than%20half%20\(54%20per-cent,States%20of%20America%20and%20China.](https://www.fao.org/forest-resources-assessment/2020/en/#:~:text=For-ests%20around%20the%20world&text=More%20than%20half%20(54%20per-cent,States%20of%20America%20and%20China.)

9. Reuters (Citation2022) “Ukraine War: How Western Sanctions on Russia Are Hurting Science and Climate Change Research”: <https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/04/11/ukraine-war-how-western-sanctions-on-russia-are-hurting-science-and-climate-change-research>.

10. Reuters (Citation2022) cites Dr Ted Schuur, the principal investigator of the Permafrost Carbon Network at Northern Arizona University: “If you cut off your view of changing permafrost in Russia, you’re really cutting off our understanding of *global* changes to permafrost” (italics mine). Another example is the Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry (Germany), which stopped sponsoring scholars at the research station in Siberia studying climate change and the melting Arctic permafrost (Reuters Citation2022).

11. Adding to the contradictions and complexity, a number of high-tech international scientific projects with major Western funding were frozen, for example a scientific project of €15 million on “designing low-carbon materials and battery technologies needed in the energy transition to combat climate change” (Reuters Citation2022).

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