

US ratifies an agreement on nuclear cooperation with Russia

On 10 December, the US Congress ratified an agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation with Russia (the so-called 123 Agreement), which opens up the American market to the Russian nuclear industry. Thus, after a failed attempt to cooperate in the field of hydrocarbon energy at the beginning of this decade, a significant economic element may now appear in Russian-American relations. At the same time, in the longer term, the Russian nuclear industry will become a significant lobby in Russia for promoting stable relations with the US.

The 123 Agreement was signed in May 2008, although after the Russian/Georgian war, President George W Bush withdrew it from Congress. President Barack Obama decided to resubmit the bill in May 2010. In accordance with procedure, the Congress was able to express its opposition to the agreement within 90 days of the session; as this was not done, the agreement will come into force after a formal exchange of notes.

The 123 Agreement opens the way to Russian/American nuclear cooperation on a commercial basis (the previous cooperation had had an intergovernmental character, and was part of US actions for the non-proliferation of nuclear technology). The new agreement will bring significant benefits to Russia; these include the implementation of the contracts concluded by the Russian company TekhSnabEksport with US companies to supply enriched uranium, valued at around US\$5bn, to nuclear power plants from 2014. Other potential areas of cooperation include the storage of nuclear waste from US reactors on Russian territory, and selling technology to the USA (closed fuel cycle, fast neutron reactors). <MaK>