

# THE REPORT ON THE SPECIAL CONGRESS OF THE RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

A Special Congress of the Russian Geographic Society (RGS) was held on 17–18 November 2009, in Moscow, in the building of Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). The Congress was held to address urgent organizational issues, specifically, changes in the Charter of the RGS that bring the Charter into compliance with the Russian Federation Law “On Non-Governmental Organizations” and other applicable legal standards, development of new activities, and the election of the RGS President.

In his report, Honorary President of the RGS, Academician of the RAS V.M. Kotlyakov described the current state and prospects of society and nominated Sergei Kuzhugetovich Shoigu for the election as the RGS President on behalf of the RGS Scientific Council. By a secret ballot and with the overwhelming majority, the Congress elected S.K. Shoigu the RGS President. The Congress approved forming the RGS Board of Trustees and approached Prime Minister of the RF V.V. Putin with a proposal to chair the Board.

The RGS is the oldest non-governmental research organization of our country, founded in 1845. It has always played a key role in science, education, and culture of Russia. Because of the socio-economic changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the RGS role has become less noticeable. However, the importance of geography itself, environmental and economic-geographical research, and specialized education is constantly rising as it is directly linked to the need of achieving adequate responses to challenges of the time. The State has realized the importance of supporting the organization of associates who share common interests in investigating

nature and analyzing the country's state of economy. Now, the RGS that for a long time carried the title of the Imperial Geographic Society is returning to its roots when it was well supported by the State.

Prime Minister of the RF, V.V. Putin, spoke at the Congress. He stressed the importance of the RGS activities and outlined the main prospects of its development: “Several environment protection and ecology initiatives will be launched. The objective is to combat pollution, reclaim land, protect natural resources, and grow tourism industry. Experience and knowledge of scientists and geographers may be used in creation of new educational projects and support for youth organizations. Of course, the work of the RGS implies openness and accessibility, and this could be achieved through the Board on Mass Media within the RGS. Powerful informational and educational realms that embrace public life would enhance and promote geographic science, scientific and environmental tourism, and greatly assist in formation of environmental consciousness of the nation. I am sure that the RGS work will continue to serve the interests of our country.”

The RGS President, S.K. Shoigu, also spoke at the Congress. According to his presentation, the RGS task is to develop a new strategy consistent with the spirit of the time while drawing on the experience and tradition of serving Russia. S.K. Shoigu has outlined the main directions of the RGS activities. It is important to disseminate geographical information about Russia and create films, television projects, books, and educational manuals. For this purpose, the RGS must open an information portal

that will make scientific discoveries more accessible. Within the RGS, a youth chapter that promotes environmental awareness should be formed. The RGS archives need to be transferred to digital media. In order to attract young scientists, special grants for best projects competition should be allocated. Research work should be pursued; its results should be applied in practice promoting growth of the country's industry, economy, and entrepreneurship, and the ability to forecast natural disasters. Among projects of the nearest future, are projects associated with ecological tourism and development of new tourist routes. According to S.K. Shoigu, the RGS is able and should become a platform for cooperation of scientists, politicians, entrepreneurs and all those engaged in environmental research, and economic and social development of the territories.

The Dean of the Faculty of Geography, Moscow State University, Vice-President of the RGS, Academician of RAS N.S. Kasimov spoke about the present-day problems of modern geography; he emphasized the need to preserve nature and cultural heritage of Russia, and crucial role of concept of education for sustainable development. According to N.S. Kasimov, the task of geography is to provide social validation for ecological, political, and geo-social decision-making process. Greater attention should be paid to the assessment of consequences of global climate change, social geography, regional and strategic planning, and urbanization.

Archival and museum activities illustrate new trends in societal behavior. It is known that a large volume of documents relating to the history of the formation of our country and development of its territories at the time of expeditions of Przewalski, Potanin, Kozlov, and many other researchers, has been accumulated in the RGS headquarters in St. Petersburg. Efforts to preserve this heritage, of course, require certain investments that are finally beginning to emerge.

The RGS intends to pay greater attention to the promotion of geographical knowledge; thematic publications, such as "Proceedings of the Russian Geographical Society", will receive financial support. The RGS plans to increase field exploration that has been considerably essential in the pre-revolution and Soviet Russia. Furthermore, one of the RGS priorities is youth education and immersion in geographical culture aimed at preservation of nature and cultural heritage of our country. Therefore, it is important to support after school club activities and organize thematic Olympiads and children's field trips.

It is hoped that difficulties in RGS activities associated with socio-economic changes in Russia of 1990s, will now be overcome, and the work of this revitalized society actively supported by the State and business community will become more efficient.

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