

Speech at Future of Transport Forum

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful for the invitation to speak at your Forum. I would especially like to thank my friend Boris Aleshin, who spearheaded this initiative.

I agreed first and foremost because the problems of automotive transport have long since ceased to be purely technical or economic. These problems encompass nearly everything that worries us in today's world. And that is why I would like to begin by telling you how I perceive this world.

This is a global, interconnected and interdependent world, which is changing at an increasingly rapid rate. This is a world, where we have yet to learn to manage its processes or influence the course of events. This is a world, where politics fall behind the rate of change and often resort to the old methods: force, pressure and domination.

It is a world that has not yet seen the formation of a global civil society, and international organisations – global and regional – have not found this power and do not play a role that would ensure the necessary minimum of control. I sometimes say that in place of a new global order, we have ended up with global turmoil. I do not feel this is too much of an exaggeration.

Recently, we discussed these problems at the New Policy Forum, which I created together with major statesmen and experts. We talked about the events in North Africa and the Middle East in the context of global changes.

There is much cause for concern. But ultimately, we came to the conclusion that the events taking place in that region, as well as the protest movements in many other nations around the world, are mass popular movements that cannot be ignored. Politicians must learn to react to the people's demands. And they must have a global vision; otherwise, their reaction will be inadequate.

I wanted to talk about this global political context, because all our specific problems are immersed in this context; they are literally saturated in it.

It also concerns the issues that you will be discussing today. I would like to note that leaders in the automotive industry are now demonstrating greater understanding than simply developing the sector in a linear manner, i.e. increasing productivity and developing new markets that may lead to a dead end.

Even as far back as 1992, when meeting with the former US Secretary of State George Shultz and a group of scholars at Stanford University, I asked the following question: from the standpoint of resources and the environment, would it be acceptable, if third world nations, with their billions of people, copy the West's current development trajectory of increasing production and consumption? Would our planet be able to withstand such a burden?

Today, we are calling the current situation a crisis of the entire economic model based on maximum profits and hyper-consumption. It has become even clearer that the possibility I spoke about in Stanford is inadmissible.

Naturally, the current model cannot simply be liquidated or changed overnight. However, we must emphatically seek new approaches, which will serve to form an alternative model, and your sector can play an important role in this.

Today, 95 per cent of cars run on oil. In twenty years, there has not been any significant reduction in average fuel consumption. The only serious achievement has been the Toyota Prius. My friend, President of Green Cross International Alexander Likhotal, drives this car. Well, as they say, that is normal for an environmentalist. Overall, though, we must admit that an enormous amount of automobile fuel is wasted, flushed down the drain, so to speak (and contributes to global warming).

I know that in the automotive industry, there is an ongoing search for technical solutions to make cars lighter, more aerodynamic and more economical, and to make the factories producing them more compact and cleaner. This is very important.

But if you look ahead, you must take into account that society and the environment will put increasing pressure on the automotive culture itself. After all, the world should not be held hostage to the automobile. Over the course of the 20th century, the automobile has crowded out people, and we are witnessing a situation, where cars are not serving people so much as people are serving cars. And if we already have one billion cars in the world today, then I do not think we should hasten the production of a second billion.

I was very pleased, when the mayor of Amsterdam arrived at our meeting on a bicycle, and I really like modern public transport systems, such as the high-speed trams in many European cities.

Naturally, we are not trying to put everyone on trams or bicycles in the immediate future, but in my view, there is a clear movement in this direction and the automotive industry must not fear this. The demand for your products will be maintained in a new framework and under different conditions, and you must prepare for the future, because whether we like it or not, it will come.

The technical and human potential concentrated in the automotive industry is enormous, and if we relate it to modern trends and social needs, it can be used to work profitably and responsibly. Remember there was a time, when your industry was among the first to demonstrate social accountability through collective agreements with unions, medical and social programmes, etc., and it only benefited from this. Now, it is time to demonstrate environmental responsibility. Ultimately, everyone will benefit from this.

Demonstrate this example to others. After all, we are in a very serious situation. The commitments made by states to fight poverty and underdevelopment (the Millennium Goals), as well as their environmental commitments, are being fulfilled very slowly, and sometimes exist only on paper.

The adoption of alternative and renewable energy sources is progressing very slowly. The reason for this is that, until now, we have not found the mechanisms to stimulate transferring to these sources of energy. However, the main cause is a lack of political will. Here, political leaders must show some accountability.

This is a very serious problem today, and it is at the centre of my attention. This is precisely why I often speak out on the necessity of developing civil society. One way or another, all of my work is connected to this.

You probably know that after stepping down from my post as president, I became involved in a number of projects and initiatives and I have been able to achieve a great deal.

One example is the Gorbachev Foundation, which has become a respected centre for independent political and socio-economic research and is home to archives and other materials on perestroika history.

Another is the New Policy Forum, which I already mentioned, as well as the World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, which has pioneered major initiatives concerning security and development problems.

Yet another is the Man Who Changed the World Prize, where we commemorate people making a unique input into creating a new, global world with greater justice and stability.

I am also involved in philanthropic projects, particularly in the fight against childhood leukaemia, which have greatly reduced mortality from this disease in Russia.

Finally, the project I consider most important is Green Cross International. I am the president and founder of this environmental organisation. There are many different reasons for this, which developed over the course of my entire life.

This organisation's philosophy is enshrined in its charter:

“Life is priceless. All forms of life have their own intrinsic value and share our planetary home in an interdependent community, in which all parts are essential to the functioning of the whole. We have a moral and ethical obligation to preserve life in its integrity and maintain our planet's health and security for present and future generations.

As the issues of climate change and environmental degradation bring about a much needed wake up call to modern society with the realization that the global challenges of security, poverty and the environment are intrinsically connected, Green Cross International will focus its activities on this critical nexus in the quest for a just, secure and sustainable future for humanity.”

Together with representatives from all continents, our organisation has developed an important document: the Earth Charter, a set of commandments for a new environmental consciousness. In an effort to bring its key provisions to the public we held hearings – Earth Dialogues – in different regions, from Barcelona to Australia.

I had a thought: why not hold Earth Dialogues with representatives from different industrial sectors? So I decided to begin with your industry. Naturally, I am not demanding an immediate answer; rather, I am inviting you to consider it.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise this: we must all embrace the notion that we are only nature's guests, rather than its managers or masters. Once we understand this, then we will find the path to a new development model that will take shape in conjunction with nature rather than in a race of consumerism. I am certain that although this is difficult, it can be done. I am an optimist.