

Russia's Putin Says Global Warming Is 'A Fraud'

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Russian President Vladimir Putin believes global warming is a “fraud” — a plot to keep Russia from using its vast oil and natural gas reserves.

Putin believes “there is no global warming, that this is a fraud to restrain the industrial development of several countries, including Russia,” Stanislav Belkovsky, a political analyst and Putin critic, told The New York Times.

“That is why this subject is not topical for the majority of the Russian mass media and society in general,” Belkovsky said.

Putin has been casting doubt on man-made global warming since the early 2000s, according to the Times. In 2003, Putin told an international climate conference warming would allow Russians to “spend less on fur coats,” adding that “agricultural specialists say our grain production will increase, and thank God for that.”

comments likely came after his staff “did very, very extensive work trying to understand all sides of the climate debate,” according to Andrey Illarionov, Putin’s former senior economic adviser, who’s now a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute.

“We found that, while climate change does exist, it is cyclical, and the anthropogenic role is very limited,” Illarionov said. “It became clear that the climate is a complicated system and that, so far, the evidence presented for the need to ‘fight’ global warming was rather unfounded.”

The New York Times published an article on how the Russian media’s skepticism of global warming is being driven by Putin’s laissez faire attitude on the issue. The Times bashed the Russian autocrat for offering “only vague and modest pledges of emissions cuts ahead of December’s U.N. climate summit in Paris.”

Russia’s largely state-run media has spent little to no time covering global warming despite huge fires raging across Siberia. Instead of blaming the fires on warming, Russian news outlets tended to focus on “locals who routinely but carelessly burn off tall grasses every year, and the sometimes incompetent crews struggling to put the fires out.”

Such reasoning wasn’t good enough for the Times, which argued that “Russian media continue to pay little attention to an issue that animates so much of the world.”

Russian media leaders argue it's not just the tone being set by Putin, but a weak economy and unemployment woes are a top concern of the Russian public — they don't seem to care much about the weather.

“It is difficult to spend editorial resources on things that are now a low priority in the midst of the economic crisis,” Galina Timchenko, who runs a news site, told the Times. “Unfortunately climate change is not very interesting to the public.”

Low oil prices have hampered Russia's economic growth, and spurred the Putin administration to take more action abroad, fomenting conflict in Ukraine and supporting the Assad regime in Syria. But at home, Russians are feeling the bite of cheap oil and western sanctions.