



50 YEARS AFTER TEST 596: CHINA'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME IN EAST TURKESTAN AND ITS IMPACT TODAY

OPENING REMARKS

Kristiina Ojuland MEP

Member of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee

Good morning everybody and welcome to the European Parliament. I realise that there is Uyghur language also available today in the European Parliament which is a unique occasion and I am very pleased to see it is possible.

I would like to excuse myself from the very beginning because I also have to join my committee meeting as we have today in the Foreign Affairs Committee a lot of important discussions on the Western Balkan countries – Montenegro, Serbia, and others who are approaching to the European Union and are going through their integration process.

But nevertheless let me just say a few words on today's event – on today's hearing – and I would like to say that [for] so few people know of Lop Nor is a testament to the ability of some states to keep their secrets close and far from the eyes of the international community, and I must confess that even I did not know about this story until we started to organise this conference. Today we are here to try and make a small impression of the secrecy and to raise the questions that we believe have to be asked of the Chinese authorities today.

Estonia - as you said - knows only also too well the risks associated with Communist atomic programmes, the environmental impact, and the culture of secrecy that surrounds them.

I grew up actually in the region about which I am going to talk now. I lived from this city where this experience took place. I lived from that city about only 25 kilometres and I grew up in this place, in this region. This town - a sleepy town, Sillamäe - a secret town in the Soviet Union - became one of the centres of the Soviet uranium production, producing over 100,000 tons during its lifetime and bequeathing the newly independent Estonia some of the most serious environmental risks in Europe.

As probably with your people, with your region, we did not know as ordinary people, what was taking place in that city, what kind of experiences took place, and it was surrounded with a big secrecy.

Among these was a 12-million tonne pond containing radioactive material left from the processing of uranium and other rare metals, and about the pond also we basically knew only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It threatened - this pond - not only Estonia but the whole of the Baltic Sea, because the pond was lying just about fifty metres from the coast of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland.

It took a project, after Estonian independence, about 10 years, involving also international collaboration, and cost 21 million Euros to remove the threat that Sillamäe pond posed. We know this because independent experts worked to secure the site and collaborated to find the best solutions to the many problems that they faced there.

I speak of this because the experience of Sillamäe appears in stark contrast to Lop Nor. There has been no independent risk assessment of Lop Nor as we know, no steps taken to address possible health problems, and a culture of state secrecy prevents any constructive steps being taken to mitigate the effects of successive nuclear tests.

This conference, I hope, will be just one step bringing international attention to bear on the problem of Lop Nor. We all have the power to raise the issue with our elected representatives, NGOs, and the European Union and to make ourselves a clear and constructive voice for the people of East Turkestan.

So I hope that also media who is present here can spread this information and bring this to the attention not only in the European Parliament but on much broader terms and congratulate you for organising this kind of event and I wish that you will have a very productive hearing and conference today.

Thank you.