



Advance Media Briefing - Tuesday March 20th, 2007

Unhappy Birthday, Euratom!

Europeans demand: phase out nuclear power

The EU's pro-nuclear Euratom Treaty will turn 50 on March 25th, the same day as the EU itself celebrates its 50th anniversary. A coalition of anti-nuclear organisations is campaigning for the abolition of the Euratom Treaty, on the grounds that it gives undemocratic and unjustified preferential financial support to nuclear power.

TV/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY: On Friday 23rd March at 11am, outside the European Commission's Berlaymont building, anti-nuclear campaigners will present to Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs "unhappy birthday giftboxes" filled with over six hundred thousand signatures demanding a phase-out of nuclear power and abolition of Euratom. See: http://www.foeeurope.org/activities/Nuclear/Press_invitation_Euratom_action.pdf

Frank Van Schaik, Campaign Co-ordinator of the European Petition Campaign against Nuclear Power, said: *"Euratom is an outdated treaty, through which the EU continues to pump millions upon millions of Euros of public money into nuclear power. It is completely outrageous to give preferential financial support to an expensive and dangerous energy source when over sixty percent of Europeans actually want to decrease nuclear's contribution to energy generation."*

HISTORY OF THE TREATY

Euratom is one of the 3 initial treaties of the European Union from the 1950s:

1. **The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)** was established in 1952 and expired in 2002
2. **The European Economic Community** was established in 1957 and was converted to the European Community (EC) in 1992. The treaty has a 'limitless duration' but has been frequently updated with the maturation of the EU
3. **The European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC - usually referred to as 'Euratom')** was established in 1957. Euratom also has no expiry date, but unlike the much-amended EC Treaty, the Euratom Treaty has remained practically unchanged since 1957.

AIM OF THE TREATY

The main aim of Euratom Treaty is to undertake various measures that together promote nuclear power across Europe. This is stated in Article 1 of the Treaty: *"It shall be the task of the (European Atomic Energy) Community to contribute to the raising of the standard of living in the Member States and to the development of relations with the other countries by creating the conditions necessary for the speedy establishment and growth of nuclear industries."* The main instruments of Euratom to reach its goals are loans for nuclear projects and budgets for research.[1]

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

The demise of the ECSC has left Euratom as the only Treaty promoting a specific technology. The EU is developing a single electricity market. Part of this process must be the development of a level playing field for energy production. Euratom is distorting the market by giving unjustified financial support to a specific technology for electricity production. While the EU is in a process of internalising environmental costs of energy production by starting an emission cap-and-trade system, producers of nuclear energy do not pay for the full costs of decommissioning and radioactive waste storage.

MEMBERSHIP

Member states of the European Union are automatically a member of the Euratom Treaty and are contributing to its budget although several members are in a process of abolition of nuclear power and others have no nuclear power plants at all. Of the 27 EU member states eleven never had any nuclear production at all. Italy has abolished nuclear energy altogether and Belgium, Germany, Spain and Sweden are working on a phase-out. European countries remain sharply divided over nuclear power. When asked, 61% of the overall EU population think that the share of nuclear energy should be decreased due to concerns such as nuclear waste and the danger of accidents. [2]

DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT

The Euratom Treaty does not live up to present EU democratic standards. The European Parliament does not have a decision-making role. The European Council has developed the practice of requesting the European Parliament's opinion

under a process named the '*consultative facultative*' (optional consultation) on some issues related to the Euratom Treaty, such as the Euratom Framework Programme. But the Council is not obliged to act on, or even acknowledge, the European Parliament's opinion.

RESEARCH BUDGET

The Euratom R&D programme covers fusion, fission and radiation protection research, including the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project. The €2.75 billion budget agreed on under the EU's 7th Framework program on Energy for the period from 2007 to 2011 is a huge increase compared to €1.35 billion for the previous seven-year programme.

Fusion will receive the lion's share of this budget with €1947 million, significantly more than the previous seven-year programme's €824 million. Nuclear fusion is a technique that involves the release of a large amount of energy when two atoms are merged together. (In contrast, in current nuclear power stations, energy is released by splitting atoms in a process called fission). Millions of Euros still continue to go into fusion research even though its technical problems have not been solved over the past decades – despite it being nearly as old as fission - and at best it will only be able to deliver on a commercial scale in the second half of the 21st century, if ever.

The €287 million budget for research into fission includes money for research on radioactive waste, research on developing a next generation of nuclear reactors (Generation IV) and research on partitioning and transmutation. It also covers the Joint Research Centre's nuclear activities, which has been allocated a budget of €571 million for managing nuclear waste, reactor safety and security.

On an annual basis, nuclear will continue to receive, on average during the next five years, three times more money than renewables and energy efficiency, with €550 million per year going to nuclear and only €168 million per year to renewables and energy efficiency combined.[3]

LOANS

Since 1977, Euratom has had a loan facility, enabling nuclear projects which otherwise could not be financed. For example, €223.5 million credit was given to the Romanian Cernavoda 2-plant. Since 1994 there has also been a loan facility for projects of European non-member states, which resulted in loans to Bulgaria (€212.5 million) and the Ukraine (€83 million). This public financial support continues while private banks are hesitant to give loans to risky nuclear power projects or are withdrawing their support, like in the case of the Bulgarian Belene nuclear power plant.

Due to the lack of EU agreement on safety, there are no binding safety standards that the projects applying for loans must comply to. The European Investment Bank, which assesses the economics of the projects, does not lend its own resources to nuclear power plant projects and thus has little experience in assessing nuclear projects.

Euratom loans cannot be used as the sole source of finance for any project and any Euratom loan will require a Government guarantee by the recipient state.

REFORM CONFERENCE OR UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL

At the time of the EU Constitution debate, five countries (Germany, Ireland, Austria, Sweden and Hungary) signed a statement declaring that Euratom is outdated and needs revision. A conference with governmental representatives could be an instrument to start such a revision process. Because this needs consensus it is difficult to start this process.

Juridical experts have declared that it is possible for member states, as they are sovereign, to leave the Treaty unilaterally. This has no consequences for membership of the other European Treaty, nor for the revived Constitutional Process as Euratom is left out of this process. Although the Euratom Treaty is established for an unlimited period, this does not mean that it is for an eternal period. International legal practice has witnessed withdrawal from Treaties before.

To push forward the process of Euratom revision or abolition and to stop financial support to a technology that its population has rejected by referendum, six Austrian NGOs started a campaign for Austrian unilateral withdrawal from Euratom, as did the German NGO Bund. NGOs in other countries might follow their example soon.

For more information, please contact:

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NOTES:

[1] See official Euratom website: http://europa.eu/scadplus/treaties/euratom_en.htm

[2] <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/07/280&format=HTML>

[3] See the Council decision Concerning the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) for nuclear research and training activities (2007 to 2011): http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_400/l_40020061230en00600085.pdf and http://www.greens-efa.org/cms/default/dokbin/159/159271.fp7_background_doc@en.pdf