

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(78) 129 final

Brussels, 31 March 1978

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN BY THE COMMISSION FROM THE PUBLIC DEBATES ON NUCLEAR ENERGY

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

COM(78) 129 final

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL

The conditions in which the public debates on nuclear energy in November 1977 and January 1978 took place make it difficult to draw unanimously acceptable conclusions. Most participants probably returned home holding the same convictions as when they set out. Nevertheless, it seems possible, with a maximum of impartiality, to pinpoint some of the governing ideas:

1. The development of nuclear energy from fission appears to be an inescapable necessity, if we adopt the hypothesis of moderate growth in a society of a type similar to that in which we live at present and if we consider the probable trend of world energy demand over the coming decades. Certainly, such development must be subject to a number of conditions:

- Nuclear energy must be considered as one among various forms of energy, i.e., a form of energy to which an excessive role should not be assigned pending the development and possible use of energy sources of another type, like renewable and environmentally acceptable energy sources. It must therefore be developed in line with the needs created by reasonable economic growth.
- Safety requirements must continue to be subjected to attentive and constant scrutiny.
- Decisions on the use and siting of nuclear installations should be taken in accordance with democratic rules, i.e., the Parliaments and elected assemblies in general -- and the European Parliament in particular -- should play an important part in the decision-making process.

2. In order to limit the use of non-renewable sources of energy, in particular hydrocarbons, without allowing the nuclear sector to occupy a position out of proportion to its importance, we must step up research and financially encourage practical applications involving new forms of energy and help the old-established sources of energy - coal, in particular - to hold their own.
3. Without creating upheavals in our present-day society, we must nevertheless redirect our activities and the habits of our citizens towards a new conception of the role of energy, and in particular towards conservation and energy-saving.
4. Lastly, the problems of energy in general (and not only nuclear energy) have assumed such significance where future generations are concerned that public opinion should be informed on the subject as fully and as objectively as possible, so that it can, with a full knowledge of the facts, judge as to the desirability and advisability of the options adopted.

These conclusions prompt the Commission to take the following measures:

1. Restatement of its main activities in the field of safety, radiation protection and new energy sources.
2. Imparting a fresh impetus to those Commission initiatives which accord more particularly with the conclusions reached in the debates: energy-saving, alternative sources, waste, siting of power stations and physical protection.
3. Preparation of new proposals and measures designed to accommodate some of the wishes expressed during these debates: carriage of radioactive substances, low-growth scenarios, information and participation.

I. Restatement of the main activities of the Community in the fields of safety, radiation protection and new sources of energy

It is by no means irrelevant to call attention to the fact that a very large proportion of the Commission's research budget (some 30%) is devoted to the improvement of safety and radiation protection.

On the other hand, expenditure in respect of new sources of energy, including thermonuclear fusion, accounts for about 45% of the research budget.

As regards light-water-reactor safety, a research programme (indirect action) linking up with the current Joint Research Centre programme will be proposed in the near future. This programme is scheduled to last five years and will have a total allocation of some 18MUC, half of which will be charged to the Community budget. The aim of this programme will be to promote information in the following areas of safety and protection including :

- loss-of-coolant accidents;
- explosion of gas clouds;
- dissipation of fission products in the atmosphere.

Under the planned 1979 review of the Joint Research Centre multinational programme (direct action) the Commission proposes to pursue and step up its activities in the field of nuclear safety and alternative energy sources, with special reference to:

- extension of reactor safety projects based on the performance of large-scale experiments;
- continuation, in close coordination with indirect action, of theoretical and experimental research on the treatment and storage of radioactive waste;
- consolidation of work on solar energy.

There is also, at an advanced stage of preparation, a draft research programme (indirect action) on the decommissioning of nuclear power stations. The allocation for this five-year programme will be some 12 MUC, of which about 6 MUC will be met by the Community. The research projects envisaged will concentrate on the following main topics:

(x) The principle of a Community action in the field of decommissioning was approved on the 17th May 1977 by the Council in the framework of the Community's environmental action programme.

- decontamination for purposes of decommissioning;
- dismantling techniques;
- processing of specific wastes: steel, concrete and graphite.

As regards research on radioactive waste, an indirect action research programme, with an allocation of some 40 MUC*, is currently under way and due to continue until the end of 1979. The Commission has already begun preparatory work on a new research programme on the subject, scheduled to commence in 1980.

In the field of alternative energy resources, June 1979 is the planned completion date for the research programme (indirect action) involving the following five sectors: conservation of energy; production and use of hydrogen; solar energy; geothermal energy; systems analysis and development of models. Preparatory work on a new research programme on alternative resources is under way. The Commission expects to forward a proposal to the Council during the second half of 1978.

A long-term overall energy research strategy is currently being worked out. The Commission expects to forward a Communication on the subject to the Council before the end of the year.

The Commission will endeavour in future to ensure that this side of its activities receives greater publicity.

In addition to the research programmes there are a number of other areas of activity: basic standards for health protection;** harmonization of methodologies; technical codes and standards relating to reactor safety; overall plan for the management and storage of radioactive waste.

The Euratom Safeguards Directorate has to satisfy itself that in the territory of the Member States nuclear materials are not diverted for purposes other than those declared by their users and that any specific safeguards commitment entered into by the Community with a non-member country or international organisation is fulfilled. It should also be mentioned that, following the first session of the nuclear debates, the Commission set up within the Directorate-General for Energy a Directorate for Energy Saving and Forecasts.

* Around half from the Community budget. This programme is a result of the Council decision of 22.11.73, establishing the first environmental action prog.

** Under this heading the Euratom Treaty lays down the responsibilities and powers of the Community in foreseeing and limiting the risk connected with ionising radiation.

II. Imparting a fresh impetus to initiatives which accord more particularly with the conclusions reached in the debates

The Commission feels that the consensus expressed during the debates constrains it to urge the Council to adopt a number of proposals on topics which the Community has a duty to deal with as a matter of priority and which are still being examined.

(a) Energy saving

A proposal for a Regulation on the granting of financial aids to demonstration projects in the field of energy saving (COM(77)187 final of 25 May 1977) has been forwarded to the Council and is currently under discussion.

Also under scrutiny is the Communication (COM(77)186 final of 27 May 1977) regarding energy savings through the modernisation of existing buildings in the Community, swift implementation of which would now appear to be imperative.

(b) Alternative energy sources

A proposal for a Regulation (COM(77)187 final of 31 May 1977), similar to the preceding one, concerns the granting of financial support for projects to exploit alternative energy sources.

This project, like the energy-saving project, has been treated with reserve by some delegations. No more time should be lost in adopting proposals which so clearly meet the wishes expressed both by the opponents and by the advocates of nuclear energy.

(c) Radioactive waste and reprocessing (Communications from the Commission to the Council of 26 July (COM(77)397) and of 15 July 1977 (COM(77)331 final)).

The Council should be reminded that a Community approach to the treatment of waste is vital - and, indeed, the only conceivable approach if we wish to avoid the dispersal of storage dumps

for radioactive materials, facilitate supervision of the network of storage sites and cut down costs.

With regard to reprocessing, the aim of Community strategy is twofold:

- to ensure that reprocessing is compatible with the aims of safeguarding Community citizens and protecting the environment and also with the use of nuclear materials for exclusively peaceful purposes;
- to coordinate the development of the reprocessing industries.

This process has been borne out by the results of the recent debates, even if in the view of some people the first aspect may appear to have been neglected at times in favour of the second.

- (d) Consultations on the siting of power stations
(Draft Council Resolution of 10 December 1976 - COM(76)576 final).

If it is true that the choice and approval of power station sites are matters falling within the jurisdiction of the Member States, it is no less certain that the parameters taken into consideration for the siting of the power stations, particularly those parameters relating to the environment, regional planning and public health and safety, are matters which first and foremost affect the public at large. Accordingly, these two categories of parameters should, as a matter of priority, be the subject of consultations at Community level.

- (e) Physical protection (Communications from the Commission to the Council of 17 March 1976 and 24 October 1977 - COM(77)520).

In this area, which is assuming growing importance in the eyes of public opinion, the Commission is renewing its call to the Council to adopt a Community approach in accordance with the Communications mentioned above.

In so doing, the Commission is pursuing two objectives:

- to obtain a harmonized level of protection in all Member States in accordance with international requirements;
- to preclude any disparities or gaps in certain Member States from creating barriers to free movement or the supply system provided for in the Treaty.

III. New proposals and measures designed to accommodate some of the wishes expressed during the debates

These measures or proposals concern the problem of transporting radioactive substances, the study of links between economic growth and energy growth, the periodic supply of information to the European Environmental Bureau and the inclusion of specialists on environmental questions in the Economic and Social Committee.

1. The Commission intends to go ahead as swiftly as possible with a study of the problem of radioactive waste transport and to put forward proposals in this connection.

Like the physical protection sector, this too is an area where there is a danger that differences in the national provisions may hamper free movement. Harmonisation is therefore necessary, having regard to the following risks:

- (a) health risks facing employees of transport undertakings and the public at large as a result of radioactive contamination under customary carriage conditions;
- (b) risks of serious accidents caused by a fissile or radioactive substance.

2. Economic growth and energy demand.

The Commission intends to embark on a study of the relationship between economic growth in general and energy demand, with particular reference to the possibility of divorcing energy demand from economic growth. With the help of this report, and also the results of the study, it should be possible to answer a number of questions raised both by the advocates and by the opponents of the nuclear programmes.

3. The essence of the malaise which preceded the opening of the first session derived from the notion that this was not an exercise in impartial information and free discussion but merely communication to those present of ideas adopted in advance. Irrespective of any basic differences that may persist, there can be no doubt whatever that the principal call emerging from the debates and re-echoed by the European Environmental Bureau after their conclusion was for a better information procedure and a greater degree of participation in the formulation, if not of a policy, then at least of its underlying concepts.

Without prejudice to the outcome of the forthcoming examination of this demand, the Commission intends to inform the European Environmental Bureau of its thoughts on the subject of and the broad lines of its energy policy - as is already the case for environmental policy - for instance, by regularly participating in the Bureau's general meetings and taking account of the views expressed on these occasions.

This formula does not rule out the possibility of more systematic procedures being envisaged at a later date, depending on circumstances and on the way attitudes develop.

4. As regards participation by and representation of environmental specialists' interests, the Economic and Social Committee, the membership of which is due to be renewed this year, would appear to provide an appropriate platform.

The inclusion of representatives from associations for the protection of the environment and the "quality of life" seems, moreover, to be in keeping with the public opinion trends observed for some time in the Member States.

The term of office of the existing representatives ends on 10 September 1978. The Member States should forward to the Council their lists of candidates - which would include specialists on environmental questions - before the end of July, in order that the appointments can be made immediately after 16 September 1978.

CONCLUSIONS

1. As far as the future is concerned, the Commission will stress the dual aspects of its proposals in its communications on energy problems. In particular, each time it introduces a measure aimed at developing nuclear energy or any other source of energy it will simultaneously present the measures which it has taken or intends to take, with special reference to the research sector.
2. The Commission is calling on the Council to reexamine, in the light of the recent debates, its proposals on energy saving (demonstration projects, modernisation of existing buildings), alternative energy sources, waste treatment, consultations on the siting of power stations and physical protection. In addition, it intends to forward to the Council proposals on the carriage of nuclear materials.
- 30 The Commission will set up a periodic information procedure for energy policy in conjunction with the European Environmental Bureau - as in the case with environmental matters -, in order that the latter may be better acquainted with the broad lines of the underlying reasons for its policy.
4. Lastly, the Commission will draw the Council's attention to the potential advantages of better representation of the specialists on environmental questions in the Economic and Social Committee.

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ONLY CONCERNS
THE ENGLISH VERSION

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CORRIGENDUM

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