

COM-4/043

Brussels, 25 April 2001

OPINION

of the Committee of the Regions

of 4 April 2001

on the

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament

on

Commission support to nuclear safety in the Newly Independent States

and Central and Eastern Europe

COM(2000) 493 final

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO

- the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Commission support to nuclear safety in the Newly Independent States and Central and Eastern Europe (COM(2000) 493 final);
- the European Court of Auditors' special report No 25/98 concerning operations by the European Union in the field of nuclear safety in the CEEC and the NIS (1990-1997)¹, together with the Commission's replies;
- the final declaration of the European Conference on Nuclear Safety and Local/Regional Democracy held in Gothenburg on 24-26 June 1997;

- the decision taken by its Bureau on 13 June 2000 to draw up, in accordance with the fifth paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, an opinion on *the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Commission support to nuclear safety in the Newly Independent States and Central and Eastern Europe*, and to assign the preparation of this opinion to Commission 4 (Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy, Environment);
- the Committee of the Regions' resolution on nuclear safety and local/regional democracy (CdR 423/97 fin)²;
- the Committee of the Regions' opinion entitled "Towards sustainability" (Fifth Environmental Action Programme) (CdR 12/2000 fin)³;
- the Committee of the Regions' opinion on the promotion of electricity from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market (CdR 191/2000 fin)⁴;
- the draft opinion adopted by Commission 4 on 9 February 2001 (CdR 7/2001 rev. 1 - rapporteur: **Mr Pumberger**, A/PPE).

has adopted unanimously the following opinion at its 38th plenary session on 4-5 April 2001 (meeting of 4 April):

The Committee of the Regions' point of view and recommendations on the Commission Communication

The Committee of the Regions

1. gives its fundamental support to the Commission's activities and to the granting of financial assistance to the CEEC and NIS in order to improve the safety of nuclear plants within the framework of the existing programmes; and recognises the serious efforts made to date by the Commission in this area;
2. reiterates its firm belief - as voiced in its resolution of 14.05.1998 on nuclear safety and local/regional democracy - that the legitimate concerns about public health in the EU Member States, the candidate countries and the NIS on account of the possible release of radiation into the environment must be taken very seriously and call for an immediate response;
3. would stress that environmental and energy matters are often the responsibility of local and regional authorities - with the exception of nuclear safety, for which national bodies are responsible - and that large sections of the general public in Europe are directly affected (e.g. impact on health, employment, and the economy) and may suffer the effects;
4. recommends that the Commission, drawing on its experience to date with financial assistance in the CEEC and NIS, should focus especially in the latter group of countries on

funding projects identified as presenting the greatest human and environmental risk (shelter implementation plan for Chernobyl), thereby giving these projects top priority;

5. thinks that, because of the difficult framework conditions in the beneficiary countries and the fact that the sale of electricity there still does not cover costs, the Community should concentrate its efforts under Phare and Tacis on projects that threaten the environment and should make greater use of its other funding instruments to finance decommissioning programmes, the improvement of safety, the management of nuclear waste and alternative energy concepts in the countries in question;
6. is still firmly convinced of the urgent need to strengthen democratic procedures for planning, building and operating nuclear plants so that all sectors of society that are affected (local, regional, national, international) can be involved, in accordance with the need for transparency, grass-roots participation and the assessment of such plants' environmental and economic repercussions;
7. welcomes the efforts to engage in a permanent political dialogue with representatives of the countries in question; and calls for the involvement of regional and local authorities in this process;
8. proposes that greater account be taken of further training and the transfer of knowledge to the countries in question, for only if the persons involved in projects for improving safety standards in nuclear power stations are themselves convinced of the projects' pertinence will it be possible to make swifter progress than hitherto;
9. stresses that in the CEEC and NIS, too, more must be done to promote the use of alternative energy sources, especially in the light of the review of the Fifth Environmental Action Programme, the draft Directive on the promotion of electricity from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market and the Green Paper entitled "Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply";
10. notes with regret that despite numerous efforts in the nuclear power sector, far too little importance continues to be attached to the development of alternative energy concepts for the CEEC and NIS, which is borne out not least in the blatant mismatch between the funds allocated to the nuclear industry and to other energy sources by Phare, Tacis, Euratom loans, Synergy, SURE and the multiannual energy programme 1998-2002;
11. therefore proposes (a) that especially in the CEEC top priority be given to the Community strategy for securing energy supplies on the one hand, and energy efficiency and saving on the other, in order to achieve the Community's objective of doubling renewable energy sources' share of gross energy consumption in Europe from the current 6% to 12% by 2010, increasing these sources' share of total electricity production to 22% and developing and applying alternative concepts for renewable energy sources and (b) that the funds used for this purpose be increased considerably;
12. is obliged to note with regret that despite efforts extending over several decades, too little importance is still attached to nuclear safety, which is borne out not least in the funds and human resources made available;
13. recommends that because of inadequate budgetary funds for nuclear safety projects and the shortage of budgetary funds in the beneficiary countries, too, the Commission should firstly prioritise its use of funds and secondly increase the budgetary funds sharply with the support of the EP and the Council;

14. regrets that, especially in connection with preparing the CEEC for accession, the implementation and effect of financial support for improving the safety of nuclear plants is still lagging behind the Council's and Commission's political priorities, despite endless Council conclusions in recent years stressing the priority to be accorded to nuclear safety;
15. notes with regret that despite the Commission Communication's perception of the problem, far too little importance has been attached to improving nuclear safety in the candidate countries;
16. therefore urges the Commission to press more strongly, in the course of the ongoing accession negotiations with the candidate countries, for nuclear power stations in those countries to comply (prior to accession) with the most advanced safety standards possible, for as long as non-upgradable reactors are in operation, operators must remain committed to a high level of operational safety;
17. would reiterate that the safe disposal of radioactive material and the siting of interim and final storage facilities and reprocessing plants will continue to be a serious problem not only in the EU Member States but also (especially as regards the safety aspects) in the CEEC and NIS and that the Committee of the Regions will keep a close watch on developments here. In this context an urgent appeal should be made for the rapid ratification by the signatory states of the Joint Convention of 5 September 1997 on the safety of spent fuel management and on the safety of radioactive waste management;
18. urges the Commission, with due regard to the rules for contracts, to ensure the requisite transparency when issuing invitations to tender, awarding contracts and assessing offers etc. within the framework of its cooperation with third countries too;
19. recognises that, because of specific circumstances and particular constraints in the nuclear sector, procedures for awarding contracts and tendering, etc., must be tailored to the situation in the sector. At the same time it would emphasise that for that very reason (financial) checks are necessary on a large scale (ex-ante, in itinere and ex-post) in order to ensure that proper use is made of resources;
20. calls on the Commission to demand evidence of compliance with the commitments which have been entered into, particularly in the beneficiary countries, in order to ensure that the agreements are implemented.

Brussels, 4 April 2001.

The President

The Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

¹ OJ C 35 of 9.2.1999, p. 1

² OJ C 251 of 10.8.1998, p. 34

³ OJ C 317 of 6.11.2000, p. 1

⁴ OJ C 22 of 24.1.2001, p. 27

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