

## **EU Energy Policy: Why Europe Needs Nuclear Power**

**Brussels, 25 April 2001:** Europe's nuclear industry has told top EU officials that the nuclear power option must be retained in the European Community to strengthen security of energy supply, increase energy independence and hold down greenhouse gas emissions.

These key messages were presented to senior officials at the European Commission yesterday (Tuesday) by FORATOM, the trade association for the nuclear industry in Europe.

FORATOM has just issued a detailed position statement in response to a Commission Green Paper, dealing with security of energy supply, which was released last November. The Green Paper was published to promote a wide-ranging debate on Europe's energy future. FORATOM's statement is the industry's main contribution to the debate, which has another seven months to run.

FORATOM recommends that the Commission should promote further discussion of the role of nuclear in the EU energy mix, both during and after the Green Paper debate. According to FORATOM, nuclear's future potential should be examined in order to define new orientations and objectives.

The EU is currently dependent on external sources for 50% of its energy needs, but this is due to rise to 70% over the next 20 years. Greater use of nuclear for electricity generation would reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and reduce atmospheric pollution.

The industry believes that, as nuclear plants emit virtually no CO<sub>2</sub>, the Commission should recognise nuclear's important contribution to the avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions. According to FORATOM, this should be factored into EU policy measures aimed at meeting the Community's commitments under the Kyoto Protocol.

Other recommendations include:

- \* Commission support for political and public processes leading to the creation of permanent solutions for the storage of all radioactive wastes;
- \* Continued provision of significant funding for nuclear research, with special emphasis on radioactive waste management and development of new reactor types;
- \* Policies encouraging 'a level playing field' for competing EU energy producers;
- \* Greater efforts by the Commission to increase public awareness of nuclear energy issues and radioactive waste management.

The FORATOM statement makes a series of points on specific issues such as security of energy supply, the environment, waste, research, economics and public acceptance. In addition, detailed answers are given to 13 questions posed by the Commission in the Green Paper.

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The full text of the position statement is available on the FORATOM website ([www.foratom.org](http://www.foratom.org)), and a key passage from the document is given below:

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Nuclear is a secure, stable and abundant source of energy, currently providing about 35% of the EU's electricity. There are many conventional uranium sources around the world, and availability is not politically sensitive. Large stocks of fissile material are already available inside the EU, and there are enough fuel assemblies (completed and in production) to provide for three to four years of normal nuclear power plant operation. Furthermore, the cost of nuclear electricity is not highly sensitive to the price of uranium. A 50% rise in the price of uranium ore would result in a tariff increase of only 2.5%, whereas in the case of oil or gas it would be around 38%. Fossil fuels have many industrial applications besides their combustion for electricity generation. Uranium has virtually no other practical uses, and its use in nuclear reactors, therefore, makes it possible to conserve valuable and finite fossil fuel reserves. For all these reasons, nuclear energy provides a robust and stable buffer against external changes that could affect other sources of energy supply.

Evidence of environmental damage from greenhouse gas emissions, coupled with recent instabilities in fossil fuel pricing and supply, illustrate the potential fragility of our situation as far as energy consumption and dependency are concerned. Furthermore, we have seen in the US state of California – even in the world's most developed economy – that serious disruptions to electricity supply are possible. These events, taken together, demonstrate that energy cannot be taken for granted. Energy availability on demand is not something that just happens. Energy supply has to be thought about and planned for in a comprehensive manner, taking into account a number of important constraints.

All energy technologies have a role to play in meeting our needs within acknowledged constraints. It is important to develop renewable energies and energy-conservation technologies so that they can reach their full potential. Appropriate funding mechanisms should be developed, but this should not be at the direct expense of other energy sources.

It is appropriate now to reassert the valuable contribution that nuclear makes to meeting the need for abundant and clean baseload\* electricity in the EU. The industry sees the European Commission as a key player in this process. Nuclear is strategically important to European energy supply because it offsets dependence on oil and gas, which are politically sensitive. Nuclear also makes a valuable contribution to the avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions. The Commission should therefore support the promotion of nuclear as part of the EU's energy mix.

*\* the power needed round-the-clock, day after day*

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