

EU Economic Affairs Commissioner says Europe must consider nuclear energy.

Brussels, 18 January 2006: FORATOM, the trade association representing the European nuclear industry, welcomes the announcement made on 16 January 2006 by the EU's Economic Affairs Commissioner, Joaquin Almunia, that given its current over-reliance upon imported power sources the EU would be committing economic suicide were it not to consider the use of nuclear energy. The statement, made during an information session organised in Madrid by Europa Press, comes at a time when the debate in Europe about nuclear energy and the unsuitability of pursuing a phase-out policy is gathering momentum in light of important security of supply and climate change considerations.

The EU's most senior economic affairs policy-maker, Spanish Economic Affairs Commissioner, Joaquin Almunia, made an unequivocal statement yesterday about the importance for the EU of revisiting the nuclear energy option. Speaking at a Europa Press information session that was attended by over 100 people, including Spanish government officials and EU representatives, Commissioner Almunia said: "I personally am particularly wary when it comes to nuclear energy, but I believe at present, considering how conditions have changed, that it would be suicide not to look again at under what conditions, what assumptions and what guarantees this option could be considered."

Commenting on the wider context of the Commissioner's statement, Dr. Peter Haug, Director General of FORATOM, emphasised that the Commissioner's words: "...reflected the growing realisation among countries with a nuclear phase-out policy that the time has come to reconsider that policy in light of the increasingly-recognized contribution that nuclear energy, as part of an overall energy mix, can make to ensure a secure supply of environmentally-friendly and affordable energy. "

Countries are struggling to meet their CO₂ reduction commitments. The problem of over-dependence upon imported power sources and the adverse affect that this has upon security of energy supplies persists - as witnessed by the recent crisis between Russia and the Ukraine. In several European countries, like the Netherlands (which recently decided to extend by 20 years the life of its nuclear power plant at Borssele), Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the UK and Spain, the nuclear debate continues to focus politicians' minds. Some governments are showing signs that phasing out nuclear energy is becoming less and less of an option.

Commissioner Almunia was addressing his remarks to the EU as a whole, but Spain's ruling socialist government (Commissioner Almunia once led the Socialist Party in Spain) will have taken note of what he said. Spain's government had initially declared that it intends to implement a nuclear phase-out policy, even though nuclear energy currently satisfies around 25% of the country's power needs. However, no calendar for the phasing out of nuclear energy had yet been finalised.

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