

25 January 2006

FORATOM's position on the Eurobarometer survey *Attitudes towards Energy*

FORATOM believes that it is very important to regularly gauge public opinion on key issues and has found the data presented in previous European Commission *Eurobarometer* surveys on energy to be useful general indicators of evolving trends. However, the recently published *Eurobarometer* entitled *Attitudes towards Energy* does not, in FORATOM's view, accurately reflect the true state of public perceptions about the nuclear energy option. By asking the public to choose from a list of alternative – sometimes costly – energy solutions the survey inevitably results in the public choosing a wish list of options that, while perhaps highly desirable, are equally unrealistic. For example, 48% chose the solar energy option, which seems to be a very attractive but almost Utopian vision - most people would, indeed, welcome an endless and free source of natural energy. The way the question was phrased and the range of choices offered led, inevitably, to the 12% rating in favour of developing the use of nuclear energy.

The reality, as reflected in several recent surveys (carried out in a number of EU countries), is that public acceptance of nuclear energy has steadily increased in the last decade. Faced with ongoing concerns about security of supply – as witnessed by the recent gas crisis involving Russia and Ukraine – and climate change and cost issues, an increasing number of citizens have expressed a more pragmatic and positive view towards nuclear energy as the option of choice. Public opinion surveys in general have shown that the more people know about nuclear, the more they are in favour of it.

The June 2005 Eurobarometer *Survey on Radioactive Waste* reveals a clear division between countries within the EU. On the one hand, there are entrenched views expressed in countries with a rigidly anti-nuclear culture, like Austria, Cyprus, Malta and Portugal. On the other hand, countries like Hungary (65%), Sweden (64%), Czech Republic (61%) Lithuania (60%), Finland (58%), France and the Netherlands (both 52%) show strong support for nuclear energy. This division makes it fundamentally difficult to accurately express an “average EU view” because the statistics cannot be validly interpreted.

Some other results of the survey were worthy of particular note:

- more than 60% of EU citizens believe that nuclear energy enables European countries to diversify their energy sources
- 61% believe that using more nuclear energy would help reduce Europe's dependency upon oil
- 62% now agree that one of the main advantages of nuclear energy is that it produces less greenhouse gas emissions than coal and oil. This is a spectacular increase (21%) when compared to 2002

More recent surveys underline the growing acceptance among EU citizens that nuclear energy is, as part of the overall energy mix, a major option for ensuring a secure supply of environmentally-friendly energy. For example, a January 2006 MORI survey revealed that over 50% of British citizens would be prepared to accept new nuclear power stations if it would help to tackle climate change. Another survey, this time in Sweden, concluded that 7 out of 10 Swedes do not feel that additional nuclear reactors should be closed in the

near future. Not surprisingly, these results mirror how the attitudes of several European governments and the European Commission towards nuclear energy (e.g. Italy, the Netherlands, Poland) have evolved of late and highlight their increasing tendency to look again at nuclear as a mainstay of energy policy.

FORATOM believes that nuclear can contribute to creating a sustainable energy system. We must keep all our energy options open. The choice should not be “nuclear or renewables”, but “nuclear and renewables”. To do so the issue of public acceptance must be tackled. The nuclear industry takes its public communications function very seriously. The industry is committed to engaging in an open dialogue with the public, political figures and the media, as part of the wider debate on Europe’s energy future.

Details about these and other public opinion surveys can be found on the FORATOM website at: www.foratom.org, in the Info Pool/Opinions section.

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