

Belgian government report on energy policy recommends phasing out of nuclear phase-out

FORATOM, the trade association representing the European nuclear industry, has welcomed the results of a preliminary study commissioned by the Federal Energy Ministry in Belgium into the challenges facing the country's energy policy-makers. The results of the study, entitled *Belgium's Energy Challenges towards 2030*, were made public on 17 November 2006. Its major conclusion is that a fundamental review of Belgium's current energy policy is urgently required if overriding economic, social and environmental goals are to be met. The major recommendation to emerge from this study, which will be further reviewed by governmental experts and independent panels prior to the publication of a final report in June 2007, is that there needs to be a "paradigm shift" of policy towards the phasing out of the nuclear phase-out, a greater emphasis on energy efficiency and diversity of energy sources and an increased use of renewables.

The government-commissioned study *Belgium's Energy Challenges towards 2030*, which was commissioned in 2003 by Belgium's Federal Energy Ministry, was submitted to the country's Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Central Bank and various review panels on 17 November 2006. This detailed analysis of policy options was carried out by a group of independent scientists, economists and energy experts. It focuses primarily upon security of supply, diversity of energy sources, competitiveness and climate change imperatives. It also reviews other key issues such as carbon capture and storage, new wind farms and the increased financing for European energy research.

The most far-reaching policy recommendation to emerge from the study is that relating to nuclear energy. The study concludes that to maintain the current policy of phasing out nuclear energy by 2025, especially bearing in mind the need for stricter post-Kyoto policies, would be extremely expensive and undermine Belgium's economic stability. It would also put more pressure on the environment by helping to increase current levels of CO₂ emissions. According to the study, Belgium should, therefore, "...keep the nuclear option open and reconsider its nuclear phase-out policy." Once that policy has been reversed, the study concludes, an agreement between the Belgian government and power plant owners in Belgium should be reached in order to promote greater energy savings, manage rising demand, develop renewables and intensify research into new energy technologies. The government's final report outlining the future direction of Belgium's energy policy should be published in June 2007.

Commenting on the preliminary study's recommendations and setting them within a wider European context, FORATOM's Director General, Santiago San Antonio, said: "Following on from the recent decision taken by the Dutch government to recommend the building of a second nuclear power plant in the Netherlands, and from the recommendations made by the recent UK Energy Review, the results of this Belgian study reflect how a new spirit of pragmatism among European policy-makers is fuelling the use of all sources of energy, especially the low CO₂-emitting ones, and the nuclear revival. The study acknowledges clearly the unique contribution that nuclear energy makes to ensuring security of supply, offering stable and affordable prices and combating climate change."

More information on the study *Belgium's Energy Challenges towards 2030* can be obtained on the Commission 2030 website at: www.CE2030.be or by contacting Mark O'Donovan of FORATOM at mark.odonovan@foratom.org or at 02/ 505 32 26.