

Nuclear Energy Sector Welcomes EU Green Paper

Brussels, 30 November 2000: Publication of the EU Green Paper on security of energy supply represents “a step in the right direction”, according to FORATOM, the trade association for the nuclear industry in Europe.

“We are pleased that this discussion document recognises the important role that nuclear power now plays in reducing dependence on external energy sources,” said FORATOM Secretary General, Dr. Wolf-J. Schmidt-Küster. “In the wide-ranging debate to come, EU leaders must bear in mind that greater use of nuclear would reduce dependency levels still further. The Green Paper also recognises that nuclear will be needed to meet future targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.”

The Green Paper’s technical background document states: “If existing nuclear plants were phased out and replaced with other conventional generating plant, it would be impossible to achieve the Kyoto objectives.”

The main document stresses the need to maintain “relative autonomy” in the energy field, and states that the medium-term contribution of nuclear power has to be the subject of an analysis, including all elements of the debate. The Green Paper acknowledges that the EU “must retain its leading position in the field of civil nuclear technology, in order to retain the necessary expertise and develop more efficient fission reactors and enable fusion to become a reality”. It also recommends that research into radioactive waste management technologies should be actively continued.

FORATOM welcomes the call by Energy and Transport Commissioner, Loyola de Palacio, for a “more coherent and responsible” European energy strategy that would mean a widening of supply options.

Said Dr. Schmidt-Küster: “The launch of the Green Paper marks the opening of a major debate on the future of energy in Europe. This is clearly a step in the right direction. These discussions will remind everyone of the valuable contribution that nuclear makes to improving security of energy supply and enhancing energy independence. Not everyone is aware that 35% of the EU’s electricity is nuclear-generated. The debate will also highlight the ‘clean air’ credentials of nuclear – the only CO₂-free way to reliably produce bulk electricity at minimal cost to the environment.”

One of the key questions to be raised in the forthcoming discussion will be the issue of radioactive waste. FORATOM points out that the only major issue still to be addressed politically is the disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste.

“We have the technology and the financing for the construction of deep underground repositories for high-level wastes,” said Dr. Schmidt-Küster. “All that is needed now is the political will to actually build these facilities. This is something politicians must now take into account.

“The Green Paper provides a unique opportunity for a new and dispassionate discussion of the benefits that nuclear energy offers European society. This opportunity should not be missed.”

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