

Swiss Voters Back Nuclear Power Option

Brussels, 25 September 2000: Voters in Canton Berne, Switzerland, have rejected a plan for the early closure of the Mühleberg nuclear power plant – a decision welcomed by the European Atomic Forum (FORATOM), the nuclear industry's Brussels-based trade association.

In response to an initiative launched by anti-nuclear activists, 64% of the canton's electorate voted in favour of the continued operation of the plant, which is near the Swiss federal capital, Berne. Only 36% came out in support of early closure in 2002. In 1998, Mühleberg's operating licence was renewed by the government until 2012. Before the vote, the Berne cantonal government and parliament had opposed the idea of early closure.

The Swiss Association for Atomic Energy (SVA) greeted the outcome of the weekend vote, saying it meant recognition of the plant's status as an "environmental trump card". The SVA said the result also showed there was no desire to interfere with the continued production of economically competitive electricity.

FORATOM joins with the SVA in welcoming the voters' decision. The forum's Secretary General, Dr. Wolf-J. Schmidt-Küster, said: "This is clear proof yet again that there is little popular support for a phase-out of nuclear power in Europe. Opinion polls in Germany and Sweden have demonstrated this already.

"The Swiss vote shows that ordinary people are not willing to give in to pressure from anti-nuclear activists. When the crunch comes, they are not prepared to give up an economically viable asset that offers them safe, reliable and environmentally friendly electricity. It is encouraging to see that a majority of voters recognised the economic and environmental benefits that nuclear can bring."

Switzerland has five power reactor units, generating about 40% of the country's electricity. Hydro accounts for most of the balance, giving Switzerland an electricity-generating sector that is almost completely free of CO₂ emissions.

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