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Euratom: 50 years too much

Report of the conference

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Co-President of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, opened the conference by pointing out the global context of fight against the climate change, which, for the nuclear sector, represents an opportunity to return to the foreground. The Greens and the anti-nuclear movement have to strengthen their efforts to counter this new offensive of the nuclear lobby and to defend the prioritising of renewable sources of energy both in Europe and in the world.

Renate Künast, president of the Green parliamentary group in the Bundestag, underlined the German legislation to phase out nuclear power exit by 2020. This progressive abolition must be accompanied with the development of other energy sources but also with a policy of energy saving. The Euratom Treaty is definitely obsolete. The rebirth of nuclear power cannot be a solution. As Einstein said, "the problems of today will not be solved with ideas of yesterday".

As an introduction to the first part of the conference, ono nuclear safety, Green MEP **Rebecca Harms** noted that the ambitious approach of the Commission with regard to energy efficiency, energy saving and the development of future solutions was watered down in the document submitted to the European spring summit (8-9 March 2007) for its approval. There is no clear majority in the European Parliament against nuclear power and the Greens are the only ones to consistently oppose nuclear in parliamentary votes. The Green position must therefore be developed and strengthened to prevent the rebirth of nuclear power.

Mycle Schneider, international nuclear policy consultant, presented the partial results of a study, currently being drafted by an international group of experts: *"The residual risk - a non-comprehensive account of nuclear events since the Chernobyl accident 1986*". Beyond the terminology differences that could exist from one country to another (accident, incident, abnormal event, ...), this study reviews the incident factors, the systemic questions, the system of classification of the incidents and the significant incidents reported during the last 20 years, more particularly the 4 specific cases of Blayais (France), Maanshan (Taiwan), Davis Besse (USA) and Tepco (Japan) reactors.

The independent energy consultant **Jim Harding** (USA) in his speech deconstructed 7 myths related to nuclear power that are commonly promoted by pro-nuclear industry
1) nuclear power is cheap,
2) learning is easy,
3) the nuclear industry can scale-up rapidly,
4) reprocessing solves the supply problem,
5) waste is no big deal,
6) reprocessing solves the radioactive waste problem,
7) the alternatives cannot compete - they already do.

As a conclusion, he pointed out the rapid technological developments in the field of renewables (in particular wind and photovoltaic technology) compared with the nuclear technology which is likely to be roughly the same in two decades.

The debate which followed the first part of the conference showed that the upgrade of the old nuclear facilities is currently one of the major problems. Indeed, the strategy of the nuclear industry now consists of extending the lifetime of the power stations (up to 50 or even 60 years) despite the risks related to the ageing infrastructures in order to reduce the price of the kw/h for the operator (but not for the final customer) and to maximise profits.

The second part of the first day tackled the question of the nuclear proliferation. **Henry Sokolski**, director of the *Non-Proliferation Policy Education Center* of Washington considers that one must expect to see nuclear power continuing to exist. He gave an overview of proliferation in the recent years and for the years to come. In this respect, 2006 was particularly important: 12 new states announced that they led peaceful nuclear programmes, including Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Nigeria, Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Dr. Dhirendra Sharma, director of the *Science for Centre Policy Research* of Dehradun in India, evoked the hypocrisy of the Western states that urge other democracies in the world to 'de-nuclearise', while failing to do so themselves. He is convinced that India could give up its nuclear programme if Western countries did so as well. He also emphasised the enormous democratic deficit in his country where no data nor no statistics concerning nuclear power are available because all this data is classified as secret for defence purposes and does not fall within the competence of the ministry of energy. According to his estimates, 50 to 60 billion US dollars were spent to date in India in civil nuclear programmes. He also referred to the fact that India is often asked to store radioactive waste but here also there is a clear lack of transparency and access to information.

The third part of the conference was devoted to the Euratom Treaty itself and more particularly to its future and to the possibility for Member States to withdraw from this Treaty. After a historical review of the Treaty by professor **Joachim Radkau**, **Tobias Lock**, a lawyer from the Institute for Public law, presented the results of a study (financed by the German Greens) which analyses the possibilities for a Member State to withdraw from the Euratom Treaty. It is possible for a Member State to unilaterally withdraw from the Euratom Treaty but there is also the possibility of a consensual withdrawal. Mr. **Molin**, Director in the Austrian Environment Ministry, confirmed the desire of Austria to reform this Treaty and also its opposition to the construction of new nuclear power stations in Europe. He detailed all the difficulties and complexities of undertaking such a reform, which has never been achieved yet despite various attempts for more than 20 years.

The final part of the conference was devoted to green energy alternatives (energy efficiency, renewable sources of energy) and more specifically to the place they have in the Council discussions. EU Environment Commissioner **Stavros Dimas** presented his positions and explicitly thanked the Greens for their positive criticisms and their pivotal role in the EU energy and climate policy.

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