en

News | 15.10.2012

Nuclear energy questioned by citizens

A debate in European Parliament's Committee of Petitions

Last week the Committee of Petitions of the European Parliament hosted a debate about the nuclear energy in the European Union, based on some of the petitions received in the last months, concretely four. To start with, a broader debate on the EU's position and role concerning nuclear energy took place following the presentation of a widely supported petition requesting the worldwide ban of nuclear power. Finally, concrete cases of emblematic power plants for the anti-nuclear movement were dealt with, particularly Garoña (Spain) and Temelin (Czech Republic), bringing the latest updates on their status. During the debate, Green MEPs **Margrete Auken** and **Ulrike Lunacek** put the stress on the need to overcome the nuclear age.

Item 15. The Petition 1042/2011 claiming an immediately commencing phase out of nuclear power worldwide, launched after the Fukushima disaster by Friends of the Earth Austria, has collected already 700.000 signatures. It claims to go beyond the current logic of Member States' competence, while putting as a priority the right to safety of EU citizens, which the use of this dangerous energy does not comply with.

The representative of the petitioners explained the reason of the petition, explaining that in Austria a big majority of the civil society is deeply against the use of nuclear energy, which ended up on a nationwide ban of this source of energy after a referendum in the late 70's. However, despite having expressed their rejection of such a risk, the Austrian people are still exposed to it, given the closeness of other Member States' power plants located in bordering areas. Connected to the stress tests it is estimated that the area of influence in case of a nuclear accident is between at least 60 to 200 km. Therefore, the consequences of a nuclear disaster cannot be considered only a matter of national interest, but cross-border. Therefore, the petitioners claim that the nuclear issue cannot longer be left only at the discretion of Member States when designing their energy mix, but rather to make EU competent on the issue by the means of new European legislation. This legislation should be on the basis of the fundamental precautionary principle in order to ensure effective protection of all EU citizens.

The European Commission referred once more to the legal framework of the treaties, which is the current basis for action, and in this particular case namely the Art. 194 on the EURATOM, according to which Member States choose the energy production mix.

Green Danish MEP **Margrete Auken** explained the case in Denmark, where the year before Chernobyl disaster already voted NO to nuclear power, mainly because the impossibility to re-insure by insurance

companies in front of a potential disaster. The financial risks associated would rely then on the public sector, given the huge amounts. This explains the current trend nowadays in Europe when in the last 30 years only a nuclear power plant is being built, in Finland, with a lot of delays and far larger costs. No interest from private sector on it. However, the main point here is to unite with the citizens in defending their rights: it is not only about money, but about social and environmental protection. Finally, it was requested not only to keep the petition open, but to do something concrete, namely in terms of new legislation by the EC.

Even the Austrian conservative MEP Richard Seeber (EPP) defended the aim of the petitioners, reminding the European Commission that the Treaties refer clearly to the protection of the physical integrity of the citizens. He argued that there are enough considerations in terms of safety and cross-border impact to make it a European matter. According to him the aim should be to create shared competences, ensuring at the same time the common technological excellence. This should be started by gathering experts from different countries. Seeber also underlined the fact that nuclear is actually a very expensive energy source: he requested the EC to undergo a comprehensive economic assessment of the full cycle, comprising the waste. Seeber also reminded that the resources for fission technology are limited and said he is convinced that no private insurance would want to bear such risk. Therefore, he asked the Commission to bet for the renewable energy sources.

The Commission replied acknowledging that among the concerns there is not only the technical security, but also civil protection and radioactive pollution.

Finally, the petitioners announced their intentions to make it a European Citizens Initiative.

Item 16. Petition 1078/2009 on the phasing out of the Garoña power plant, which is the oldest functioning NPP of Spain (started functioning on 1970) and one of the core struggles of the Spanish anti-nuclear movement. Finally, new developments have taken in the last weeks on this case, as there is the closedown of the plant now expected by July 2013.

However, as GUE Spanish MEP Willy Meyer pointed out, this is not yet official, since it does not obey to a decision of the Spanish government but rather an administrative question of the owning company, Nuclenor. Actually, when granting in 2009 an extension of maximum ten years of working life, the Spanish government –socialist by then- requested some conditions to be fulfilled after 2013 in order to authorize its functioning after that date. The operating companies, however, have not presented the required documentation on the deadline of September this year, and therefore the functioning will not be legal after the set intermediate deadline. Nevertheless, the company has not requested formally the dismantling process to the Spanish company.

Conservative Spanish MEP Carlos Iturgaiz certified that that was indeed the current state of play, and therefore the Committee of Petitions should follow-up the case according to the petition received, thus keeping the file open for further review.

Item 17. Petition 1026/2011 on the building of a nuclear power plant on the sea
The European Commission noted that no notification had been received on the intention of such a project, while according to the Art. 47 of EURATOM this should be the case. Likewise, in case where underwater nuclear waste dumping is expected, the EC should be addressed, according to Art. 37 of the same treaty, which has not been so far the case.

Item 18. Petition 1403/2011 on expansion of the Temelin nuclear power plant in the Czech

Republic. This nuclear power plant, located near the border with Austria and Germany, is among the ones who generated the greatest alarm in the recent stress tests.

The representatives from DG Environment of the Commission explained that the EC is monitoring closely the situation, particularly in relation to fulfillment of the Environmental Impact Assessment directive procedures in the extension project and the Water Framework Directive standards. The EC noted that such a project could be related to the article 4.7 of the latest directive, which allows for exception, although linked to strict conditions. They committed to be strict into the accomplishment of such conditions. In any case the EC would frame this process in their ongoing analysis of the proposed basin management plans by the different Member States.

Austrian conservative MEP Seeber pointed out on the expectable negative effects of the release of hot waters on the quality of the water and ecosystems according to the WFD standards.

In its turn, Green Austrian MEP Ulrike Lunacek stressed that such an impact on the quality of water has not been assessed in Temelin yet, and that in no case the nuclear power plants can by-pass the community law. Therefore, she asked for deeper inquiry from the Commission and firm action to ensure respect to all concerned EU legislation, while keeping the petition open to ensure that the European Parliament is punctually informed on the latest developments.

Recommended

Press release

@gettysignature



[U-turn by Conservatives and Social Democrats Puts Jobs…]

04.11.2026

Press release



Conservatives and Social Democrats Put Jobs at Risk

22.10.2026

Press release

© Eva Serrabassa



[Data centres: Tech companies must no longer be allowed…]

21.09.2026

Press release

Leonid Andronov



The EU puts railways on track for better future

19.05.2026

Responsible MEPs



Margrete Auken

Member



Ulrike Lunacek

EP Vice-President, Member

Contact person



Marc Gimenez

Advisor on Transport and Tourism

Please share

- E-Mail