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Radioactive contamination of water and food

EU protection rules still decided behind closed doors

Each year since 2011, March 11th has become the anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear accident. It echoes April 26th, the remembrance day of Chernobyl, another human and environmental disaster linked to nuclear energy, which occurred back in 1986.

Many of the current nuclear reactors in the world are the result of technological choices of people who are not necessarily alive anymore. Yet the consequences of those choices affect people today all around the world, as well as generations to come, far beyond political borders and timeframes.

Very long term and global, these are the characteristics of the impacts of nuclear energy, be they environmental, economic or related to public health.

You would assume that for such an important topic, decisions are taken in the most democratic and inclusive possible way, wouldn't you? That, for example, elected parliaments debate and decide on how to protect current and future generations in case something goes wrong. For instance, you would expect that in the unfortunate case of an accident, politicians you elected to represent you would have prepared measures for immediate protection of something all of us fully depend on every day: food and drinking water.

The reality check shows us the opposite of what one would legitimately expect. Nuclear contamination still is not regulated according to the most recent democratic standards.

In 2016, after Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear accidents and in spite of the rise of public attention on nuclear issues, the Council revised the applicable rules and adopted a regulation laying down [maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination of food and feed following a nuclear accident or any other case of radiological emergency](#). In 2013, the Council had adopted another regulation specifically on drinking water and laying down [requirements for the protection of the health of the general public with regard to radioactive substances in water intended for human consumption](#).

Both regulations are based on recommendations from “experts”, but their possible links to the nuclear industry are not disclosed. In both cases, the European Parliament - the only European institution directly elected by all European citizens - only had the power to give a non-binding opinion, contrary to other topics of food safety relevance, where the Members of the European Parliament co-decide together with the Council, for example through a veto right on modifications of maximum residue levels of pesticides.

The Greens/EFA group has [constantly](#) been pushing for a radical change in this area: public health and environment protection decisions relating to nuclear should be based on the Lisbon Treaty, not on the old Euratom treaty from 1957, that was signed twenty-two years before the first MEPs were elected. One major thing our group obtained, in September 2016, is the publication of the names of the current experts. Unfortunately, the [list of experts is hidden in a corner of the website of DG Energy](#), under the very inexplicit title “Composition of the group of experts 2015-2020”. Last but not least, the declarations of interest of each expert is still lacking.

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