Press release | 03.11.2010

Nuclear waste

EU Commission seeks to bury real concerns with proposals on nuclear waste

EU energy commissioner Günther Oettinger today presented proposals for a new directive setting out EU rules on nuclear waste management and disposal. Green MEPs have expressed concern that the proposals fail to deal with crucial aspects of the nuclear waste issue. Commenting on the proposals, Greens/EFA co-president **Rebecca Harms** (Germany) said:

"Today's proposals on new EU rules for nuclear waste seem to be little more than a cheap PR exercise: an attempt to create the illusion that the EU is doing something and that the problems of nuclear waste can be solved, thereby providing a veneer of legitimacy to the revival that the nuclear industry continues to hope for. Nobody should be taken in by this spin; these proposals fail to address the core issues and citizens' concerns on dealing with dangerous nuclear waste.

"On the crucial question of nuclear waste definitions, the proposals are far too loose, giving member states a free hand to determine what can be considered as nuclear waste and allowing them to exclude a wide array of potentially dangerous materials (1). The Commission fails to set out any proper framework on how to assess and evaluate nuclear waste management and disposal options, and fails to provide any guidelines on decision-making and the need for public participation. The crucial question of financial liability is also left unresolved, despite the fact that a number of member states have weak or non-existent provisions on how to handle the huge financial burden of dealing with nuclear waste. Cost estimates continue to rise and were recently doubled in France.

"Instead, the Commission gives the impression that deep geological disposal (burying the waste deep underground) is consensual, without taking into account the continuing concerns with this process. The debate is, however, far from closed and there is no technical or political consensus on permanent disposal options.

"Overall, the proposals fall far short of what would be required to provide for sufficient EU rules on nuclear waste. Clearly, the absence of any solution on how to deal with dangerous nuclear waste makes current calls for a 'nuclear renaissance' in Europe all the more irresponsible."

(1) Notably, any spent nuclear fuel for which the industry can claim there may be a potential for reprocessing could be excluded. This would mean that Commissioner Oettinger falls short of his own promises to ban nuclear waste exports. In addition, waste from uranium mining, waste from military nuclear activities and various other nuclear releases will not be covered by the directive.

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Rebecca Harms

Member

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