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Press release | 10.01.2013

Study on defects in Belgian nuclear reactors

Unresolved safety risks with Doel 3 and Tihange 2 reactors - Restart would be irresponsible

In August and September 2012, cracks were discovered in the reactors at Tihange 2 and Doel 3 nuclear power plants in Belgium and both reactors are therefore still currently closed. The Belgian regulatory authorities are expected to issue their recommendation soon on whether the reactors can be restarted. Following on from this, the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament commissioned a piece of research from independent materials scientist Dr Ilse Tweer. Ms Tweer was asked to produce a report on the state of these nuclear reactors based on all the available evidence. This report was presented today at the European Parliament (1).

Rebecca Harms, Greens/EFA Co-President and nuclear expert, explained:

"It would be irresponsible to restart the reactors before the issues raised by Dr Tweer have been fully answered. Until we know beyond a shadow of a doubt as to when and how the cracks in the steel came about and whether there's any risk of the defects worsening during operation, the reactors should remain shut down. A sudden rupture of the pressure vessel could be catastrophic for the densely populated region surrounding the reactors.

"Lessons should be learnt and conclusions drawn from this case. Unless already the case, all reactors should be fully investigated for similar errors. Moreover, the case has brought to light the failures of nuclear oversight. Thousands of cracks in the pressure vessel have only been discovered after 30 years in operation and the documentation relating to steel suppliers and manufacturers is incomplete.

"This case also shows how risky it was to restrict the remit of the European stress tests to external influences from natural disasters alone. Dangers due to material defects or ageing, such as those discovered in the Belgian reactors, were not considered. The cracks in the reactor pressure vessels could therefore not be detected during the stress tests and they are consequently not mentioned in the action plans.

"We are expecting a swift response from Commissioner Oettinger on the security issues in Doel 3 and Tihange 2. Moreover, Günther Oettinger, as someone who defended the future of the nuclear industry, will no longer

be able to use the European stress tests as an alibi. Two years ago, following the Fukushima disaster, the Commissioner promised that nuclear safety policy would be tightened. We hope he will finally deliver. "

1) The study by Dr Ilse Tweer is available here

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Rebecca Harms

Member

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