Recommendation 1068 (1988)[1]

Nuclear accidents

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having reviewed the situation one year after the Chernobyl accident;

2. Having regard to the proceedings of the Parliamentary Hearing on "Nuclear Accidents: Protection of People and the Environment" (Paris, 8-9 January 1987);

3. Having examined various national and international measures, in particular the initiatives of international organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organisation, the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Communities;

4. Recalling its previous work in the field of nuclear energy, and especially its Recommendation 949 (1982) on the concentration of industrial installations and nuclear power stations in frontier regions, and its Resolution 847 (1985) on radioactive waste management;

5. Noting that the Chernobyl accident:

   5.1. was due to the combination of a. a sequence of human errors, and b. design factors specific to the RBMK reactor;

   5.2. led to the uncontrolled release of radioactive materials which caused serious pollution of the environment in many countries;

   5.3. revealed that European countries, notwithstanding co-operation within the European Communities and OECD, had no consistent or concerted way of responding to the emergency;

   5.4. has led accordingly to loss of public confidence in the ability of national authorities to provide for nuclear safety and the protection of the public;

   5.5. has caused deferral in some countries, though not in the Soviet Union, of decisions on the expansion of nuclear electricity production;

6. Considering the need to establish strict international security arrangements to prevent nuclear catastrophes, building on the highest technological standards available;

7. Conscious that nuclear-powered electricity is today a reality in Europe with the exception of a few countries, and that, in the, present situation, its phasing-out in those countries that have substantial commitments would take not several years, but several decades;

8. Aware that, despite widespread use of nuclear energy, mistrust and fear remain deeply embedded in public opinion;

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1. Assembly debate on 7 October 1987 and 25 January 1988 (16th, 17th and 19th Sittings) (see Doc. 5764, report of the Social and Health Affairs Committee, Doc. 5751, opinion of the Committee on Science and Technology, Doc. 5805, opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, and Doc. 5769, opinion of the Committee on Agriculture). Text adopted by the Assembly on 25 January 1988 (19th Sitting).

9. Noting that this basic fear is increased by the secrecy that surrounds nuclear plants, and by the confusion and incoherence that dominate the information given to the public by the authorities in case of accident;

10. Considering that a nuclear accident may have transfrontier dimensions and can even become a disaster for a whole continent, with long-term health and environmental effects not comparable to any other accidents and catastrophes;

11. Believing that there is a danger that nuclear installations and nuclear materials under transport or storage may become targets of acts of international terrorism, which is becoming increasingly ruthless in its actions;

12. Believing that in the case of Europe this potentiality is amplified by the high population density and the closeness of frontiers;

13. Convinced that there is a need for closer co-operation at European level, under more strict parliamentary supervision, as a vital element not only to avoid emergencies, but also in the ability of public authorities to respond adequately thereto;

14. Believing that human safety and the protection of the environment should be a major criterion in national and European decision-making and rule-setting;

15. Considering that agriculture is not only the most vital of society's activities in the sense that withoutfood human life cannot continue, butalso the sectormost vulnerable to nuclear catastrophes;

16. Recalling the extensive damage caused by theChernobyl accident to agriculture in wide parts of Europe - affecting grazing, harvesting, the sale of food as well as international trade - and fearful that future accidents could have even more serious consequences;

17. Recognising that reindeer husbandry and freshwater fishing in Northern Scandinavia have been particularly affected, threatening the very identity and survival of the Lapp civilisation;

18. Aware that the uncertainty as regards the full consequences of Chernobyl remains an ongoing concern and will continue to haunt agriculture in the affected countries for years to come, as the different radioactive substances work throughthe soil and are absorbed by plants and animals, thus requiring permanent monitoring by the international community;

19. Noting that, while farmers have been compensated financially by governments, no guarantee system has been established in the event of future accidents, nor has compensation at international level, that is between governments, been satisfactorily included in existing conventions;

20. Noting that many uncertainties may always remain in the field of long-term effects of radiation releases and of the effects of low levels of radiation;

21. Believing therefore that, pending further research, nuclear energy should be considered as potentially dangerous, and that as a general principle any unnecessary exposure to radiation should be avoided,

22. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite the governments of member states:

22.1. As regards safety:

a. to review and upgrade their commitments to co-operation within or with IAEA, the OECD Nuclear Energy Agency and the European Communities;

b. to accept a moratorium in new construction until international or European standards have been elaborated as regards design, safety, operational rules, and the rights of neighbouring states in cases where nuclear power stations are to be built inside a 100km-wide frontier zone;

c. to shut down plants which do not correspond to the international standards;

d. to provide for international inspection and monitoring of such compliance, and for the publication and availability on request of inspectors' reports throughout the IAEA area;

e. to insist on designs or design adjustments which provide for automatic monitoring of the actions of reactor operators and the annulment of those which threaten nuclear safety;

f. to improve working conditions in and around nuclear power plants, and to review systems of training and retraining;

g. to ensure in particular that simulators for the training of operators are available for a specified period (at least one year) before any new reactor is charged with fuel;

h. to work towards less secretive attitudes on the part of those responsible for the civil nuclear industry by, inter alia, insisting that spent fuel from civil reactors should be reprocessed in, separate buildings from those used for military reprocessing, that the plutonium arising from civil operations should be stored separately from military plutonium, and that records thereof should be regularly published and made readily available;

i. to ensure that nuclear power stations are kept under close governmental and legislative control, as a safeguard against commercial interests taking precedence over safety;

j. to consider with caution the selling of nuclear technology to countries with little technical, medical and administrative potential to be deployed in case of accident;

k. to ratify, if they have not yet done so, the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials, with a view to protecting nuclear materials while in international transport, in particular, plutonium;

l. to keep under constant review security measures aimed at preventing the dangers of international terrorism;

22.2. As regards the protection of people and the environment:

a. to ratify and to provide resources necessary for the implementation of the International Atomic Energy Agency Conventions on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and on Assistance in the case of a Nuclear Accident or Radiological Emergency;

b. to make it compulsory - by way of a protocol to the IAEA convention or a new legal instrument - for notification to be made to neighbouring countries as well;

c. to set up consultation machinery with the neighbouring states and the populations concerned before deciding to site nuclear plants in frontier regions;

d. to draw up principles of public international law for liability and rules for adequate compensation for damage by the responsible government in case of accident;

e. to agree on simplified radiation-measurement schemes intelligible to the public at large;

f. to harmonise safety levels for radionuclides in the air, soil, water and foodstuffs, and to train qualified staff to measure them;

g. to agree on and to implement systems of measuring and monitoring radioactivity in the environment and of rapidly sharing this information, so that, in the event of an emergency, a coherent overall picture of the radiological situation emerges;

h. to draw up and publish, in concertation with neighbouring countries that might be affected, emergency plans for all nuclear installations, with special regard to the evacuation and protection of the population, to the training and equipment of fire and ambulance services, and to the holding of rehearsals with the personnel involved;

i. to agree on the criteria according to which, in the event of an emergency, public authorities should intervene to warn and protect the public against the effects of radioactive contamination and pollution, and to alert the public authorities of potentially affected countries;

j. to establish consultation with competent independent groups in order to assist the governmental control system in the efforts of controlling radiation, and to encourage co-operation between them and public authorities at local level as regards information of the public and the implementation of emergency measures;

k. to include in their information schemes written information, especially for vulnerable areas, on shelter, food consumption, self-decontamination, etc., in advance of any accident, and additional information after accidents;

l. to encourage and provide for epidemiological investigations designed to detect the long-term effects of radioactive substances, in the form of malignant or hereditary diseases;

m. to encourage and provide for further studies on the impact of radiation on man, in particular in controversial areas such as bone-marrow transplants, and to determine the exact role of medical and pharmaceutical professions in case of accidents;

n. to harmonise exposure levels for foodstuffs, and to abstain from using political or commercial motivations in applying restrictions on imports and exports;

o. to insist in international forums, in conformity with existing IAEA conventions, on immediate notification of nuclear accidents in order to allow national authorities as well as farmers maximum time between a radioactive release and the contamination of surrounding or distant areas;

p. to establish, nationally and internationally, accident scenarios for agriculture, for instance as regards the protection of exposed livestock and the decontamination of food, especially fresh fruit and vegetables;

q. to work in favour of international harmonisation - be it within OECD's Nuclear Energy Agency, the IAEA, the WHO or the FAO - as regards methods for gathering, processing and expressing data on radioactivity - including its impact on the food chain - as well as strict emergency intervention levels for foodstuffs;

r. to stop contaminating the sea by dumping radioactive material into it;

22.3. As regards the future of energy production with respect to social and health consequences:

a. to set up research programmes, incentives and laws for a more rational use of energy-economising possibilities;

b. to compare the social costs and consequences of nuclear energy with those of fossil and renewable energy forms;

c. to encourage industrial and scientific participation for solar-energy projects in European cooperation programmes such as Eureka, in view of creating working places and innovative development for small and medium-sized enterprises.