Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**Recommendation 1209 (1993)**[1]

# Nuclear power plants in central and eastern Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is aware of the welter of political, ethnic and economic problems which descended upon the countries of central and eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist regimes. As a result, the problems of run-down nuclear installations are not at present seen as an absolute priority by the public in those countries. Some of these power plants are, however, veritable powder kegs and pose a threat to all the peoples of Europe as well as the environment.

2. In this field, complacent optimism is just as dangerous as scaremongering. In interested circles, astronomical figures have been put forward for the cost of refurbishing some sixty reactors in current use. The situation must be examined with technical precision and political and economic realism, bearing in mind the fact that in some countries nuclear power supplies sometimes up to 50% of all electricity production.

3. The safety of a power plant is very often determined by a set of parameters, poorly understood by the general public, and there are no clear-cut international standards whereby a nuclear plant can be classified as safe or not. Nevertheless, it is now generally accepted that certain types of Soviet-designed reactors present shortcomings and that this situation is often compounded by new problems such as a shortage of qualified labour, a lack of spare parts, etc.

4. Much is at stake not only because of the potential danger of the situation but also because another accident would compromise the future of nuclear energy as a whole, at a time when it provides about 25% of electricity production in the industrialised countries of the west.

5. In the last two years some initiatives have been taken internationally to remedy this state of affairs. Certain projects have been set up by the European Community and the G7 Munich Summit of June 1992 where an action programme was launched. Nevertheless, the initiatives currently under way present a confused picture and political will seems to be lacking.

6. The Assembly believes that the west is faced with an awesome challenge which cannot be met without a huge commitment by all governments. The time which has lapsed since the Chernobyl accident has shown the limits of isolated actions taken at a commercial level. In this exceptional period of European history a surge of solidarity is called for.

7. Moreover, it seems necessary to set up machinery for parliamentary supervision of nuclear energy management in countries of central and eastern Europe still without this facility. Such parliamentary supervision must be accompanied by total transparency, providing for public awareness of the governments' energy policy decisions.

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1. Assembly debate on 5 February 1993 (29th Sitting) (see Doc. 6736, report of the Committee on Science and Technology, Rapporteur : Mr Bassinet ; Doc. 6746, opinion of the Political Affairs Committee, Rapporteur : Mr Efraimoglu ; Doc. 6759, opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, Rapporteur : Mr Flückiger ; and Doc. 6747, opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Rapporteur : Mr González Laxe). Text adopted by the Assembly on 5 February 1993 (29th Sitting).

8. The Assembly therefore calls on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to invite the governments of the member states as well as the governments of the other member states of OECD to step up international co-operation on improving the state of nuclear power plants in the countries of central and eastern Europe. This co-operation must cover the following measures :

8.1. Cultivating safety. Firstly, there are inexpensive measures which could be taken quite quickly, such as making good the shortcomings in legislation and standards. Motivating and training staff are essential further measures. Bilateral projects, ‘‘twinning" between nuclear power stations in east and west, as well as the special programmes devised by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to enable staff for instance to react more efficiently in emergencies, should help this goal to be achieved. Attention must also be paid to the environmental risks posed by the processing of used nuclear fuel.

8.2. Operating improvements. The potential for human error must be offset by a more sophisticated computerised system. In this context, the restrictions on strategic exports imposed by Cocom should be further reviewed. Moreover, better operation and monitoring can only be exercised by independent regulatory and licensing agencies which did not exist under the communist regime. Such agencies are the only safeguard against accidents being concealed from public knowledge.

8.3. Information and training. Appropriate training concerning both specific problems linked to nuclear energy, and those of energy policy in general and energy conservation, should be granted at all levels from schools to politicians and civil servants. The regions situated in the surroundings of nuclear power stations need particular attention in this respect.

8.4. Reactor modernisation. One of the most difficult aspects is an assessment by country/plant/ unit taking account of both technical and economic aspects. Safety and viability criteria must be applied. As regards safety, all reactors currently under construction must comply with international safety standards. As regards viability, account should be taken of cost-efficiency comparisons with other alternative energies as well as of energy efficiency measures. Even temporary stoppages for modernisation purposes would lead to considerable problems of energy supply, with economic repercussions, and these would have to be offset.

8.5. Economic implications. The necessary improvement in the safety of nuclear power plants in central and eastern Europe has also important economic implications and consequences, and is related to the general energy supply situation. Council of Europe member states in a position to do so must extend every possible assistance for the achievement of this task, whilst ensuring proper co-ordination among them.

8.6. Shutdowns. Considering that at present there is no agreement between the different authorities on this issue, nor an international authority with ultimate decision-making powers and that the figure of fifteen to twenty dangerous reactors has been mooted, including all RBMKs, urgent studies should be undertaken in order to determine those which ought to be and can be shut down.

8.7. Setting up a high-level decision-making mechanism with extensive powers. The difficulties set out in paragraphs iii and iv demand the setting up of an ad hoc central mechanism with clearcut powers. It would decide on priorities and give the green light to various programmes in close co-operation with national authorities, and possibly recommend shut-downs. It should include representatives from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) - to give advice on the economic viability of a given project - and the IAEA. The latter would provide technical assistance and act as a clearing-house to gather and circulate information on all assistance programmes.

8.8. The organisation of ‘‘energy aid and technology transfer" in Europe. A serious programme of permanent and/or temporary shutdowns cannot be contemplated without creating the necessary conditions for making good any energy-supply shortfalls in the countries concerned, whether for industrial or domestic needs. The setting-up of a European energy charter, essentially aimed at promoting the exchange of raw materials and technology, is a definite step in the direction of recognising an ‘‘Energy Europe". It would also require the creation of a European emergency electricity-supply network by interconnecting even temporarily national networks.

8.9. Strengthening the resources of the IAEA. The assistance provided to countries of central and eastern Europe constitutes a considerable extra burden for this agency. The programmes for diagnosing problems and helping national nuclear safety authorities to cope call for increased financial resources.

8.10. Nuclear waste management. Special attention should be paid to the problems of nuclear waste management, and in particular to the conditions of their possible transport and final processing techniques on the storage sites.

8.11. International convention on nuclear safety. The medium-term aim should be the creation of an international legal framework, namely a convention, which should spell out the principles governing the allocation of responsibility between designers, contractors, operators and subcontractors while defining the obligations on governments.

8.12. Action by the central and east European countries concerned. Countries in central and eastern Europe affected by closures of, or capacity reductions in, nuclear energy plants for safety reasons should be encouraged to consider ways of improving the energy supply by :

*a.* enhancing energy consumption efficiency, namely by reducing waste ;

*b.* ceasing to subsidise energy as soon as possible,notably by raising domestic prices to world market levels ;

*c.* stepping up the development of alternative energy supplies, such as oil, gas and hydro-power.

9. The Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to launch an appeal to the governments of member states to reassert their political commitment and speed up their efforts to reach rapid solutions. The objective of refurbishing eastern Europe's arsenal of nuclear plants cannot be attained without increasing the proportion of direct contributions by member states as opposed to commercial contracts with or without preferential terms. This requires an almost ten-fold increase in the financial commitment made to date.

10. The Assembly calls on the Committee of Ministers to transmit the present recommendation to the concerned governments of non-member states of the Council of Europe, as well as to the competent international organisations.