Recommendation 846 (1978)[1]

Energy and the Environment

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Having regard to the findings of, and the communication adopted by, the Parliamentary Colloquy on Energy and the Environment, held in Strasbourg on 24 and 25 November 1977 ;

2. Convinced that the energy crisis is one of the greatest political challenges Europe has had to face in the post-war years ;

3. Believing that economic growth is the best way for member countries to solve their social problems and to help towards improving the situation of the developing countries ;

4. Aware nevertheless that economic growth, however changed its contents may be in response to environmental needs and constraints on supplies of energy and raw materials in the foreseeable future, means higher levels of energy consumption ;

5. Considering that the environmental implications of using and developing any particular source of energy need to be weighed against the expected costs and security of energy supplies as a whole ;

6. Concerned in particular by the lack of scientific information on the environmental impact of power stations on coastal sites and in European waters, particularly in regard to the effects of heated effluents on marine flora and fauna ;

7. Noting that, in the period to the year 2000 :

a. indigenous resources of oil and natural gas will probably not amount to more than one fifth of Europe's primary fuel needs ;

b. geological conditions and the weight of investment required may prevent Europe's coal production from expanding by more than one quarter ;

c. although they may make a significant contribution on a longer time-scale, new energy conversion and utilisation technologies and renewable sources (sun, wind, wave, tide, plant and geothermal) are unlikely to meet more than a minor part of total demand ;

d. because of the time required for developing fast breeder reactor technology, which could ensure energy independence (in contrast to conventional nuclear power which depends on imports of uranium), only a few sodium-cooled fast breeder reactors (LMFBRs) meeting perhaps 2 % of total energy demand, could be operating commercially by the year 2000, assuming that solutions will have been found by then to a certain number of technical, economic and political problems relating to this type of reactor (specific investments in fissile material, cooling period, use of the plutonium cycle, etc.) ;

8. Convinced that, in the interests of having as diversified an energy supply system as possible :

a. more vigorous action is needed to develop and apply policies for energy conservation ;

---

1. Assembly debate on 2 October 1978 (14th and 15th Sittings) (see Doc.4215, report of the Committee on Science and Technology). Text adopted by the Assembly on 2 October 1978 (15th Sitting).

b. coal should be used more widely as a substitute for oil wherever possible, having regard to environmental and health considerations ;

c. all nuclear technological options (fission, re-processing, fast breeder and fusion) should be kept open, and decided after thorough investigation into their technological feasibility and economic competitiveness ;

d. substantially greater resources should be devoted to research into and the development of new energy conversion and utilisation technologies and to the exploitation of renewable energy sources, both by individual countries and within the framework of the appropriate international organisations ;

9. Considering that the most important task for member states in the energy field is to embark on a policy that lessens the very heavy dependence on oil from countries outside Europe ;

10. Considering moreover that it is today uncertain whether fast breeder reactor technology can function on a large scale, that the security risks involved are not yet established but are certainly much bigger than those arising from conventional nuclear power reactors, and that the costs of developing fast breeder reactors may be so high that they may well not be commercially competitive ;

11. Believing that adequate and controllable safeguards against the proliferation of nuclear weapons are not incompatible with the right of any country to have access to civil nuclear technology,

12. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

a. invite member governments, at national level and within the appropriate international organisations :

to initiate research into the methods and legislation required to enforce energy conservation, and to decide on energy policies which emphasise energy conservation and less dependence on imported oil ;

to support plans for the further construction of nuclear power plants and for experimental work on nuclear fusion, on condition that satisfactory guarantees may be obtained in regard to the secure permanent storage of radioactive wastes, and that everything possible has been done to maximise operational safety on the basis of the most recent scientific knowledge ;

to intensify research and development on new energy conversion and utilisation technologies and on the exploitation of renewable energy sources, and to consider whether there is, as yet, in these fields, an effective pooling of information between member countries on their national experiments and pilot projects ;

to ensure that the non-economic benefits of solar and renewable energy technologies (e.g. in regard to health and environment and to rendering energy supply systems less vulnerable to disruption) are fully taken into account in weighing up their competitiveness with traditional and nuclear energy technologies ;

to bring forward proposals for the long-term expansion of coal production capacity, to encourage the substitution of coal for oil (both in direct use and in power stations), and to investigate the climatic impact of any large increase in the combustion of fossil fuels ;

to promote within the framework of the appropriate international bodies the establishment of safeguards against nuclear proliferation, with particular reference to the plutonium storage scheme of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and to the guidelines which should be published without delay, of the London Nuclear Suppliers Club covering the transport and export of nuclear materials ;

to co-ordinate their research and action and to harmonise their national legislations with regard to the building of power stations on the European coastline and in European waters, and to pay heed to the repercussions which the operation of such power stations may have on the ecological balance, on marine flora and fauna, and on food supplies from the land and the sea ;

to encourage the development of combined heat and power plants, in view of the advantages these present with regard to environmental protection (greater output with no greater pollution) and to the use of the energy produced in the form of electricity and residual heat ;

to give consideration to ways of transmitting power which respect the natural and urban environment to a greater extent, in particular by the laying of underground cables and conduits ;

b. arrange, within the Council of Europe's Intergovernmental Work Programme, for studies to be conducted on :

the possible implications, with regard to security measures and their effects on civil liberties, of a large-scale commitment in Europe to the use of nuclear power ;

the co-ordination of policies for energy supply and electricity production with policies for environmental protection and regional development.