

Summary

Expert Hearing : "Nuclear Projects in the EU - A Renaissance?"

hosted by MEPs

Rebecca Harms, Co-President of the Greens/EFA, Germany, and

Sirpa Pietikäinen, EPP, Finland

on April 7 2010 in the European Parliament, Brussels

After an introduction by Rebecca Harms, three presentations of current nuclear construction projects in the EU were given.

First Toni Wenisch from Ökoinstitut Vienna presented the project of the Nuclear Power Plant Belene in Bulgaria. Plans to build a Russian VVER reactor in Belene were first launched in the 1980s. Constructions in Belene had been halted for the first time as early as in 1992 when public protest arose as the construction site is situated in a highly seismic active area. In 2005 the project was put on the agenda again by the Bulgarian government. But due to lack of funding it was put on hold again last summer. The enormous costs as well as public pressure caused banks like UniCredit and later the German energy utility RWE to withdraw from the project. Currently, the Belene project is in a limbo, with no western investor interested in building an unknown Russian VVER reactor.

The second case, presented by Patricia Lorenz, Friends of the Earth Europe, was the NPP Mochovce 3 & 4 in Slovakia, where the construction of an outdated VVER 440/213 reactor type with a design from the 1970ies is ongoing. The Italian utility ENEL as the major shareholder does not shy away from completing those two reactors without a full pressure containment, providing no sufficient protection against passenger airplane crashes. At the same time the project is in breach of the EU law and the UN Aarhus Convention on Information and Public Participation. The plant is under construction based on a construction permit from the 1980s without a valid EIA, which is required both by current Slovak as well as EU legislation. Regarding the lack of public consultation the Aarhus Compliance Committee accepted a complaint against Slovakia and is supposed to issue its judgement until summer.

The "flagship of nuclear renaissance" in the EU, the European Pressurized Reactor EPR that is under construction in Olkiluoto, Finland, was the topic of the last presentation introduced by Lauri Myllyvirta from Greenpeace Nordic/Finland. Olkiluoto 3 is the first "3rd generation" reactor with the "streamlined" design that was supposed to overcome licensing and construction hassles and re-enter nuclear age after the Chernobyl disaster. But instead the project is struggling with poor quality, design problems, cost overruns and construction delays. A further, less known aspect is the generation of nuclear "super waste". As the Olkiluoto 3 EPR is designed to burn up uranium much more intensely than operating utility reactors, the waste is twice as hot, up to 12 times as radiotoxic, and harder to contain.

The hearing was met with keen interest by around 70 participants.