

Background

Alliance of Regions for Phasing out Nuclear Power Across Europe

In favour of a European energy transition without nuclear power

The European Union is approaching a historic crossroads with respect to energy policy. According to Commissioner Maroš Šef ovi , 2016 should be the year in which the European Energy Union achieves results. However, within the framework of these negotiations aimed at creating an Energy Union, several EU Member States are calling for the promotion of nuclear power. Nuclear lobbyists and government backers of nuclear power in several Member States (especially the United Kingdom, France, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe) are forcefully advocating a renaissance of nuclear power, defending the dangerous view that it ought to play an important role as an ostensibly environmentally friendly future technology. Likewise, the latest European Parliament resolution of 15 December 2015 (P8-TA-ProV (2015)0444) on the future Energy Union argues in favour of creating an "an enabling framework for those Member States that wish to pursue new nuclear power projects to do so".

This demand is highly problematic, for a number of reasons. The construction of new nuclear reactors in the EU has now become totally uneconomical. For almost all such planned developments in EU Member States, new reactors are proving no longer competitive on the energy market. The two new construction projects under way in Finland and France are years behind schedule and will end up costing considerably more than planned. For the UK's new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, it will take billions in subsidies paid for by energy consumers to complete the project. The compliance of feed-in-tariffs for nuclear power stations with EU internal market rules, planned for Hinkley Point C and possibly other sites in Europe, is currently examined in a legal case before the Court of Justice of the EU. So it is hard to understand why billions should be pumped into nuclear power, which has been a high-risk technology for decades now. In fact it is almost absurd, given the marked drop in prices for renewable energies. Consequently, backing a renaissance of nuclear power via the EU represents a disastrous, misguided choice. Those currently supporting nuclear power are shutting their eyes to the immense costs associated with it, just as they are blocking out the dangers posed by our ageing nuclear facilities. The call for a renaissance of nuclear power is totally at odds with the development of renewable energies and defies the opportunities posed by the energy transition.

The nuclear lobby and the aforementioned group of pro-nuclear Member States' representatives are even going so far as to press EU bodies in Brussels for pro-nuclear state aid guidelines on energy, which would end up leaving taxpayers with a heavy bill to pay. Those in favour of a renaissance of nuclear power are also insisting on cash infusions into long-term nuclear power projects, and even want to see funds from the EU budget allocated

to them. This would tie the European Union down to costly, dangerous, misguided investments that would have consequences for decades to come.

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster and the fifth anniversary of the Fukushima accident. Both these catastrophes rendered large swathes of land uninhabitable, robbed many people of their homeland and will continue to pose a health threat for an unforeseeable time to come. In fact, 30 years on, work on eliminating the consequences of the Chernobyl meltdown is still ongoing in Ukraine today.

Disasters of this kind cannot be ruled out in the EU either, where the often very old nuclear reactors in operation are highly prone to breakdowns, and the inhabitants of Europe's regions are being exposed to mounting risks, as numerous recent examples indicate. The recent restart of the Belgian reactors in Doel and Tihange, compounded by major operational problems, made the tremendous dangers posed by these nuclear power plants just across the border all too apparent. As long ago as 2012, it became known that thousands of cracks had appeared in the reactor pressure vessels of Tihange 2 and Doel 3, prompting several lengthy shutdowns of these facilities. Nonetheless, the national authorities recently gave their green light to their continued operation for several more years.

The Alliance of Regions for Phasing out Nuclear Power across Europe is forming to send out a powerful signal opposing this mistaken, pro-nuclear path for Europe's energy policy. Steps must be taken to prevent a risky, outdated and economically totally unviable technology from continuing to be kept going artificially by means of subsidies as Europe transforms its energy supply. For this would the EU would waste the opportunity arising from the energy transition, to de-carbonise our energy supply by adopting energy efficiency measures and using renewables. We now have to implement the UN climate agreement reached in Paris. Member States, regions and cities should make a contribution towards protecting our climate. The agreement must be ambitiously implemented by expanding our use of renewables and applying energy efficiency measures. The abandonment of fossil fuels must on no account be replaced by misguided investments in nuclear energy.

The network of GMO-free regions, a very successful example of cross-border cooperation, is our precedent for setting in motion another such international process, starting at the sub-national or sub-federal level. For the dangers of nuclear power do not stop at national borders, making regional and transnational alliances is indispensable.

Joint declaration

by the
Alliance of Regions for Phasing out Nuclear Power Across Europe

In favour of a European energy transition without nuclear power

Regions BADE-WURTTENBERG, LOWER SAXONY, NORTHRHINE WESTPHALIA, UPPER AUSTRIA, RHINELAND-PALATINATE, THURINGIA, GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY OF BELGIUM, SAARLAND

At the first meeting of the 'Alliance of Regions for Phasing out Nuclear Power across Europe' the undersigned members advocate **a nuclear-free energy transition for Europe** and declare the following:

No subsidies for nuclear power!

The undersigned are convinced that the promotion of nuclear power is hampering the development of the single European energy market and distorting competition to the detriment of renewable energy sources. The British government's planned nuclear subsidies must not be allowed to pave the way for further projects to build new nuclear power stations in the European Union.

Limitations of liability in the event of nuclear accidents are indirect subsidies!

The limitations of liability set out in some EU Member States in the event of nuclear accidents constitute indirect subsidies of the nuclear industry. The undersigned hold the view that unless liability is handled the same and strict way throughout Europe, competition will in any case be distorted, to the detriment of renewable energy sources. Furthermore, if any damage occurs, the different arrangements applying in different places are at odds with the principle of equality when asserting cross-border claims for damages.

True-cost pricing for power generation, decommissioning, dismantling and final disposal!

Harnessing nuclear power entails vast consequential costs. Right now there is no working final repository for highly radioactive waste anywhere in the world. If the energy companies are unable to bear the costs of dismantling and final disposal, national governments have to intervene. The undersigned maintain that this calls into question the 'polluter pays' principle set out in EU treaties, and call instead for true-cost pricing, cost transparency and comprehensive liability on the part of plant operators for the consequential costs of using nuclear energy.

True-cost pricing must also apply, above all, to power generation. When the price of electricity is calculated, external costs like final disposal, plant dismantling, impact on public health, insurance costs and liability costs must all be factored in. When such a holistic view is taken, and all these costs are internalised, renewable energies emerge as a highly advantageous option. But where nuclear power is concerned, the aforementioned factors – as well as the risks of incidents or disasters – are often suppressed or only very sketchily presented, to say nothing of previously received and therefore 'hidden' nuclear power subsidies. By contrast, renewables are associated with low external costs.

Nuclear power is not a climate-friendly option for the energy transition!

The message from the outcome of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris is clear: fossil fuels no longer have a future. Nonetheless, the Alliance of Regions for Phasing out Nuclear Power across Europe is adamant that the abandonment of coal-based energy must on no account lead to a renaissance of nuclear power. Indeed, what is needed in the context of the energy transition is investment in future technologies and markets, not making a misguided about turn and heading back into the nuclear past. Nuclear power cannot and must not be allowed to replace coal. Quite apart from major risks posed by existing facilities and any future nuclear reactors, from the economic viewpoint renewables and energy-efficient options leave nuclear power way behind when it comes to achieving a low-carbon economy.

In the light of the UN agreement in Paris, we need to set our sights on sustainable climate protection measures. Nuclear power is incompatible with EU-wide targets for energy and climate protection. Moreover, an energy transition based on energy efficiency and the use of renewables will create substantial long-term employment and growth in an expanding global market. Consequently, we demand the rigorous development of renewables, energy efficiency and energy-saving measures and the requisite investments in these domains. It is essential that we continue systematically exploiting the sun, wind and water as energy sources and building up wide-ranging expertise in environmentally friendly and energy technologies.

Brussels, March 2, 2016