Protection of public health: radioactive substances in water intended for human consumption

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted the report by Michèle RIVASI (Greens/EFA, FR), and amended the proposal for a Council directive laying down requirements for the protection of the health of the general public with regard to radioactive substances in water intended for human consumption.

The Commission is called upon to alter its proposal accordingly, pursuant to Article 293(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 106a of the Euratom Treaty.

The main amendments suggested by the committee are as follows:

Amendment of legal basis: Members want the proposal to follow the **ordinary legislative procedure** and be based upon **Article 192(1)** of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and not upon Articles 31 and 32 Treaty establishing the European Atomic (Euratom), as proposed by the Commission.

The report underlines that radionuclides in water intended for human consumption are currently dealt with under the Directive 98/83/EC (Drinking Water Directive). In order to ensure legal certainty and consistency of the Union legislation on drinking water, it proposes that **the legal basis should be the same as that for Directive 98/83/EC** to treat radionuclides on the same footing as all other carcinogenic contaminants.

Parametric values: these are based on the scientific knowledge available, taking into account the **precautionary principle**. They must ensure that water intended for human consumption can be consumed safely on a life-long basis, taking as reference the **most vulnerable citizens**.

Non-compliance with a parameter that has an indicator function: in this event, the Member State concerned should: (i) determine the cause (ii) assess the level of the risk to human health including in the long-term and the possibilities for intervention and (iii) on the basis of these findings, take action to ensure the water supply complies with the quality criteria laid down in the directive as soon as possible.

This remedial action may go as far as shutting down the facility concerned if the quality of water requires such action. Priority should be given to **action**, which rectifies the problem at source.

Information for consumers: consumers should be informed immediately of:

- **the risks, and the measures already taken** by the authorities and the time necessary for the remedial action to take effect ;
- **the quality of water** intended for human consumption via easily accessible publications. Members want updated information regarding areas at risk from potential sources of radioactive contamination to be made available to consumers at all times by local administrations.

Natural mineral water: the Commission should, at the latest two years after entry into force of the directive, present a proposal to revise Directive 2009/54/EC, in order to align the control requirements for natural mineral waters to the requirements provided for in this Directive and in Directive 98/83/EC.

Monitoring programmes: each Member State should establish robust monitoring programmes to check on a regular basis, that water intended for human consumption meets the requirements of the Directive. In particular, Members want Member States:

- to ensure that the measures taken to implement the Directive do not, under any circumstances, have the effect of allowing any deterioration in the present quality of water intended for human consumption;
- to develop new technologies which would minimise the time needed to isolate nuclear waste from the environment following a natural disaster ;
- to take all measures necessary to ensure that radioactive waste from filtered drinking water is disposed of according to the provisions in force;
- to carry out risk assessments of radioactive waste deposits that could have an impact on ground water or other sources of drinking water that could be endangered by natural disasters.

Samples and analysis: in line with the **'polluter pays'** principle, if monitoring shows contamination to come from an artificial source, it should be the person responsible who meets the costs, rather than the water operator or the public.

Natural radiation levels and radiation from human activity: Members propose that natural radiation levels and contamination from human activities be **managed in a differentiated manner,** on the basis of distinct dosimetric criteria and bearing in mind different groups affected, especially **in terms of age.**

With regard to natural radioactivity in drinking water, the report notes that reference concentrations proposed by the Commission have been calculated using the dose coefficients for adults. However, calculations show that for other age-groups, especially **infants less than one year old**), these reference concentrations would lead to exceeding the total indicative dose (TID). In order to be consistent within the proposal, and to assure a level of protection corresponding to **0.1 mSv TID for all age groups,** the most vulnerable group of population must be taken as basis for the calculations.

With regard to the radiological impact of normal levels of human activity, the maximum reference dose should be **lowered to 0.01 mSv/year**, corresponding to 10% of the acceptable natural dose.

Review of Annexes: Members consider that **at least every five years**, the Commission shall review all the Annexes on parametric values, references for radioactive substances and sampling and analysis, in the light of scientific and technical progress and make amendments through **delegated acts**.