Nuclear sector, safety: actions for the CEECs and the New independent States NIS

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The European Commission should seek an accord on nuclear safety standards and regulation for the construction and operation of nuclear power stations, the fuel cycle and transport conditions with the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEEC) and the New Independent States (NIS), within the framework of the International Convention on Nuclear Safety. It should further agree an energy strategy for each of the CEEC and the NIS under the partnership and cooperation agreements with these countries. The accession negotiations with the CEEC should ensure that nuclear safety is guaranteed. The enlargement of the EU must under no circumstances compromise nuclear safety, which is a priority of "Agenda 2000", whereas compliance with its requirements is part of the acquis communautaire. The European Commission is called upon to present, as soon as possible, concrete proposals on improving coordination between the different departments responsible for the EU intervention in the nuclear sector of the CEEC and the NIS, in particular as regards the link between the actions to be taken in the field of research (5th RTD Framework Programme) and external relations (PHARE and TACIS programmes). These are the central demands formulated by the Committee, which endorsed the report drafted by Gordon ADAM (PSE, UK) in connection with the Commission communication on nuclear sector related activities for the CEEC and the NIS. The debate in plenary during the March session in Strasbourg will take place against the background of the Court of Auditors· Special Report No 25/98. The plenary was shocked to hear from Court of Auditors President Mr Friedmann last November that only ·300m had been spent so far for support for nuclear safety in Central and Eastern Europe, although the EU had earmarked some ·850m for that purpose between 1990 and 1997. The Court of Auditors further stressed that, at the end of 1997, it was not possible to judge whether there had been any actual progress in terms of nuclear safety. The Research Committee would like the Commission to draw up a comprehensive report responding in full to the criticisms and questions set out in the Special Report. The Commission is also called upon to prepare for Parliament a bi-annual report on work in progress by means of Community programmes, assistance by Member States, contribution of EU industry and the Nuclear Safety Account handled by the EBRD. Where shortcomings and abuses in programmes are disclosed, they should be ruthlessly investigated, notified to the European Parliament and measures taken as appropriate. The committee welcomes the formation of the Western European Regulators Association and its contribution to a definition of nuclear safety standards for the EU. It also welcomes the creation of independent authorities to ensure compliance with these standards in the candidate countries. In the committee·s opinion, safety assistance for first generation RBMK and VVER 440/230 reactors, which cannot be upgraded to an internationally acceptable safety level at reasonable cost, must be limited only to short-term safety improvements which are shown to be necessary to keep them in operation. No EURATOM loans for the modernisation of other units should be granted without first securing a clear undertaking that first generation RBMK and VVER 440/230 reactors will be decommissioned once and for all. The agreed upgrading plans for the operational reactors of other types should be speedily completed. The committee finally underlines the importance of giving additional support to national regulatory authorities in the CEEC and the NIS by means of the PHARE and TACIS programmes, provided that these authorities are legally independent and implement a real culture of independence.