Nuclear industries in the Union

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OBJECTIVE : to identify common principles with a view to maintaining the contribution of nuclear power to the energy supply. SUBSTANCE: In its communication, the Commission emphasizes that proper handling of nuclear energy, including the issue of irradiated fuel and waste disposal is a priority objective. Use of nuclear energy has beneficial effects in terms of energy supply security, fuel imports, know-how in the field of high technology, skilled jobs and the reduction of CO2 emissions. It also poses problems owing to concerns over safety, transport, waste management, decommissioning and non-proliferation. All these aspects merit careful attention at all times. Almost 40 years after the signing of the Euratom Treaty, the European Community has a mature nuclear industry covering the entire fuel cycle. However, the European Union and some of its Member States may, in the context of a future energy supply strategy, review the role of nuclear energy alongside other alternatives. Consequently, the Commission believes that, in order to provide a framework for the continuing contribution of nuclear energy to the energy supply, some common principles have to be followed. The suggested principles are: - the right to decide to develop or not the peaceful use of nuclear energy belongs to each Member State; - the choice made in this regard by any of the Member States has to be respected; - Member States having chosen to use nuclear energy need, in parallel, to ensure a high degree of nuclear safety, respect the non-proliferation requirements provided for in the relevant international agreements in force, as well as a high level of human health protection; - while it is individual Member States who are responsible for setting safety standards and licensing nuclear installations, and national operators who are responsible for their safe operation, both share collective responsibility towards all European citizens for ensuring nuclear safety. Moreover, a high degree of nuclear safety within the Community alone is not sufficient. Nuclear safety improvements in CEECs and in the NISs are also needed, and to achieve this, the combined efforts of the Member States, the European Community, the partner countries and the wider international community are essential.