Nuclear safety: financial resources earmarked for the decommissioning of nuclear power plants

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The committee adopted the own initiative report drawn up by Rebecca HARMS (Greens/EFA, DE) in response to the Commission communication on financial resources earmarked for the decommissioning of nuclear power plants.

MEPs said that it was important, "for the protection of human beings and the environment", that nuclear power plants should be properly decommissioned after they have been shut down definitively. They noted that a lack of financial resources might in some cases delay decommissioning and said that it was necessary to ensure that in each Member State all nuclear undertakings have sufficient financial resources available when needed to cover all the costs of decommissioning, including waste management. They added that the approach to managing financial resources earmarked for decommissioning differed from one Member State to the other, and called for the sound management of these resources, which should be used for fair investments "fully in line with EU competition law avoiding distortion".

The Commission should, with due regard for the subsidiarity principle, draw up precise definitions concerning the use of financial resources in each Member States, taking into account the decommissioning as well as the management, conditioning and final disposal of the resultant radioactive waste. The report stressed that the resources should be managed and used with maximum transparency, and that external auditing should be guaranteed.

The committee felt that the Commission's communication provided an opportunity to draw attention to the safety aspects of decommissioning nuclear power plants and said that safety issues relating to the protection of humans and the environment should be "paramount" when it came to the choice of decommissioning strategy. It called for a review, in all Member States, of the practice of releasing low-level radioactive substances from areas subject to nuclear and radiation protection legislation when a plant is decommissioned.

Other points raised in the report included support for the Commission's position that the cost of nuclear decommissioning must be taken into account when assessing the economic viability of any power plant, and a reminder that, in line with the international liability conventions, nuclear power plant operators are responsible for arranging insurance to cover civil liability during the entire decommissioning period against unforeseen incidents or accidents. In conclusion, MEPs wondered whether the accounting provisions made so far in a number of Member States and the corresponding financial resources were equal to the real needs, and they welcomed the financial support, subject to certain basic conditions, granted by the EU to various decommissioning projects in the new Member States.