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

2005/2027(INI) - 16/11/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Rebecca HARMS (Greens/EFA, DE) on the use of financial resources earmarked for the decommissioning of nuclear power plants. (Please see the summary of 26/09/2005.)

The importance of decommissioning nuclear power plants: Parliament recognised that it is important, for the protection of human beings and the environment, that nuclear power plants are properly decommissioned after they are shut down. A lack of financial resources for decommissioning might in some cases delay the decommissioning of nuclear power plants and hence should be avoided. Parliament noted the Commission's intention to adopt a non-binding recommendation on this subject in the coming weeks, as well as the Commission's intention to undertake significant survey work on this subject during 2006 in order to support the formulation of Community policy and legislative initiatives.

Financial resources earmarked for decommissioning. In all Member States, all nuclear undertakings must have sufficient financial resources available when needed to cover all the costs of decommissioning, including waste management in order to uphold the polluter pays principle and avoid any recourse to State aid. Parliament called on the Commission, with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity, to draw up precise definitions concerning the use of financial resources earmarked for decommissioning in each Member State, taking into account decommissioning as well as the management, conditioning and final disposal of the resultant radioactive waste. The approach to the management of such financial resources differs from one Member State to another. Parliament stated that these financial resources to be used for fair investments fully in line with Community competition law, thereby avoiding distortions.

Safety and environmental aspects: Parliament noted that at each step in the decommissioning of nuclear power plants the safety of humans and the environment must be considered and that previous experience should be put to good use as far as possible. There are two strategies - immediate decommissioning and staged decommissioning strategies whose respective advantages and disadvantages should be weighed up in view of the location and the characteristics of the reactor. Safety issues relating to the protection of humans and the environment should be paramount in respect of the choice of decommissioning strategy. Parliament called for a review in all Member States of the practice of releasing low-level radioactive substances in particularly large quantities in areas subject to nuclear and radiation protection legislation when a plant is decommissioned.

Economic aspects: Parliament considered it acceptable for exceptions to apply, for example in the new Member States, due to safety considerations. It questioned whether the accounting provisions made so far in a number of Member States and the corresponding financial resources are equal to the real needs, but welcomed the financial support granted by the European Union to certain decommissioning projects in the new Member States. Parliament went on to state that it supported the Commission's position that the cost of nuclear decommissioning, which is to be understood as covering other external costs and subsidies for other types of electricity production, must also be taken into account in assessing the economic viability of any power plant in such a way as to avoid distortions of competition. Finally, Parliament noted that the operator of a nuclear power plant is responsible for arranging insurance to cover civil liability during the entire decommissioning period against unforeseen incidents or accidents in line with international liability conventions.