Assessing Euratom: 50 years of European nuclear energy policy

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Eugenijus MALDEIKIS (UEN, LT) entitled "Assessing Euratom - 50 Years of European nuclear energy policy". The report examined the extent to which the Euratom Treaty remains a suitable legal framework for nuclear energy activities and whether it can contribute to Europe's economic competitiveness, energy independence and security of supply.

Assessing the 50 years of Europe's nuclear energy policy, the committee emphasised how the Euratom Treaty has provided the EU with a balanced framework for developing a competitive nuclear industry which, in 2006, produced 32% of Europe's electricity, i.e. the largest share of non-carbon electricity in the EU. The report also underlined the important role the Treaty has played in developing legislation on health protection, and said that this legislation "must remain under the responsibility of the European Union" to ensure that basic standards for the protection of workers and the general public are applied. It also pointed out that safeguards (dealt with under Chapter VII) "are one of the major successes of the Euratom Treaty" and that these safeguards also provide a real guarantee for countries that supply nuclear materials, thereby complementing the non-proliferation controls of the IAEA.

However, the committee also highlighted several lacunae with regard to the Euratom Treaty. It regretted that the growth in Parliament's powers, including codecision, had not been reflected in the Treaty and denounced as "evidence of an unacceptable democratic deficit the fact that Parliament is almost completely excluded from Euratom legislative process". It also regretted the absence of a legislative corpus of harmonised standards with real added value for nuclear safety, the management of radioactive waste and the decommissioning of nuclear plants.

Looking at the future of Euratom, MEPs stressed that, despite its imperfections, the Euratom Treaty "remains for the moment an indispensable legal framework" without which there might be a renationalisation of nuclear policy in Europe and consequently a setback for the *acquis communautaire*. The report also said that deleting one or more chapters from the Euratom Treaty or merging certain provisions into the EC Treaty would unbalance the Euratom Treaty as a whole by weakening supervision of nuclear energy use in Europe. It called on the Council and the Commission to address the democratic deficit inherent in the Euratom Treaty and extend the codecision procedure to legislation adopted under it so that Parliament can be closely involved in legislative procedures in the nuclear field. In other recommendations, MEPs called on the Commission to submit new proposals for directives on the safety of nuclear facilities, on waste management and on closure and decommissioning of nuclear facilities, taking into account the 'polluter-pays' principle. They also encouraged the Commission to secure the funding of ambitious research programmes and called on the Council, bearing in mind the objective of security supply and targets to reduce CO2 emissions, to define a coordinated policy that would encourage investment, in full compliance with safety requirements, aimed at extending the life of and improving the performance of existing reactors, as well as investment in new capacities. Finally MEPs called for the role of the Euratom Supply Agency to be revived and for the powers conferred upon it by the Euratom Treaty to be used in full and for the continuation of intense international cooperation, especially with the IAEA, to avoid any redundancy in the respective actions.