Assessing Euratom: 50 years of European nuclear energy policy

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This staff working document summarises the changes of the Euratom Treaty over the last 50 years and the actions carried out over this period to the present day with a view to developing a vision of Euratom’s role in the future.

The context in which the Euratom Treaty came into effect is different to that which was envisaged during its negotiation. Among the changes appear, in particular, the discovery of oilfields and the facilitated accessibility to materials and nuclear technologies. The development of the nuclear sector has proven to be more fragmented and more marked by national character that that envisaged in 1957.

The acquis of the EAEC which was built, in a rather continuous and coherent way, is detailed in this document. This has evolved in a general way according to Community interest in the context of the development of the nuclear energy sector in the EAEC and the world.

The Commission has played a leading role, inasmuch as its powers have allowed, to propose and ensure that the Treaty's resources have been applied since 1 January 1958 in accordance with the needs of, and the changing situation in, the EU.

The changing nature of the actions can be summarised in 5 stages :

- 1958-1968: application of the Euratom Treaty by the European institutions in a less favourable context to Community action.
- 1969-1979: the rise of national and private nuclear programs in Europe following the 1st oil crisis. Co-operation with the IAEA and contribution to non-proliferation.
- 1980-1990: strengthening the social requirements with regard to nuclear issues. Response to the 2nd oil crisis. Reaction and lessons learned from the Three Mile Island (1979) and Tchernobyl accidents (1986).
- 1991-2001: participation in the revival of international co-operation in the nuclear field following the end of the USSR, especially for the safety of nuclear activities.
- 2002-2007: consideration of the role of Euratom Treaty in the Union, in particular to ensure the safety of nuclear activities in the context of the recent enlargement process, the liberalisation of the electricity markets and the debates on competitive based energy strategies, the security of the supply and the environmental issues related to climatic change.