

Hosted by the Slovak government, the fifth plenary meeting of the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) took place in Bratislava on 25 and 26 May 2010, gathering 250 high-ranking participants discussing opportunities, risks and transparency of nuclear energy.

The Forum was opened by the Slovak Prime Minister, Robert Fico, the Czech Prime Minister, Jan Fischer, and EU Commissioner Günther Oettinger, in the presence of Ministers, Members of the European Parliament, industry leaders as well as regulators and representatives from civil society.

The Forum took place in a challenging context where worldwide there is a growing recognition of the need for a responsible use of nuclear energy. This was recently highlighted at top political level, in particular at the Paris Conference on access to civil use of nuclear energy, at the Washington Nuclear Security Summit, with a clear commitment of world leaders to secure all vulnerable nuclear materials within four years, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York.

Within the EU – with a new European Parliament, European Commission and Permanent Council President following the Lisbon Treaty – energy policy is among the key priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy. An essential element for a Europe that is more efficient with regards to the use of resources is the gradual transition towards a low carbon economy. While a special European Summit could be dedicated to energy security in early 2011, it is clear that – together with increasing use of renewable energy sources - nuclear energy will continue to contribute to these EU policy priorities.

Risks

The legal framework for nuclear energy in Europe needs to be further completed. Following the adoption of the nuclear safety Directive last year, to which ENEF has successfully contributed, the Forum has recognised the need for a legally binding Community instrument for radioactive waste. Among the essential elements, ENEF underlines that each Member State should develop and implement an adequate national plan for nuclear waste management in line with the subsidiarity principle.

It is equally important to ensure a sufficient level of training and qualified staff, in particular technicians and engineers in the nuclear industry, but also for radioprotection and medical applications of nuclear. In this regard the creation of the European Nuclear Energy Leadership Academy (ENELA) and the European Human Resources Observatory in the Nuclear Field (EHRO-N) are very much to be supported.

In the coming months the Forum working group Risks could focus in particular on the following:

- Preparing a detailed contribution for an EU Recommendation on harmonised conditions for safe long term operation of NPPs
- Guidance for the successful national implementation of geological waste repositories and contributions to the upcoming EU legislation
- Monitoring the concrete implementation of the ENELA and EHRO-N initiatives
- Strengthening international non-proliferation regime with an integrated EU approach.

Opportunities

ENEF discussed the contribution of nuclear to a low carbon economy, taking into account also security of supply and competitiveness considerations. In this context reference was made to the results of the SWOT report prepared by the Opportunities Working Group, which in the coming months will focus on the following issues:

- Developing a long-term vision for the role of nuclear energy up to 2050, thereby analysing existing energy scenarios and linking them with developments of the electricity grid. It is important to cover both production and transport of electricity, including the development of the smart and super-grid. In this context there is a need for combining base load electricity generation by large power plants with the decentralised generation based on renewable energy sources, while taking account of the needs of electricity consumers including large industrial ones. The international dimension should be fully integrated, in particular the development of nuclear energy by EU's key partners (USA, Russia, Japan, China).
- Ways of increasing the dialogue with financing institutions, in particular in the current financial and economical crisis, in view of facilitating the necessary investments in low carbon power generation in Europe. This could include Euratom loans as well as an analysis of the US model of loan guarantees.
- Encouraging further research in the field of nuclear technology, in particular for nuclear safety, waste management and the development of new generation power plants with the objective of increased safety and reduced waste generation. Fostering the relationship with the technology innovation aspects for nuclear energy, in particular, the Strategic Energy Technologies Plan (SET Plan), the Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform (SNETP), the Implementing Geological Disposal Technical Platform (IGD-TP), and the financing of research infrastructures. Analysing deeper the way forward for the production and supply of medical radioisotopes and the link to the financing of research infrastructures.
- Continuing the work along the action lines of the nuclear (legal) roadmap, in particular on state aid issues and new build, as well as liability.

Transparency

ENEF welcomed the results of the Brussels conference organised last year by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Luxembourg round table organised earlier this year by the Commission and the French National Association of Local Information Committees (ANCCLI) on the possible application of the Aarhus Convention in the nuclear field. The latter, in particular, is a very interesting development highlighting the need to involve local, regional, national and Community levels, and contribute to increase transparency in the nuclear field. Consequently, the Working Group Transparency should focus on:

- Presenting good practices in Europe to enrich and stimulate the application of the recommendations on information, communications, participation and decision making which contribute to strengthen nuclear governance and transparency.
- Supporting initiatives on transparency in the nuclear field, by providing advice and suitable input, as well as the consultative process on the implementation of the Aarhus Convention; integrate results from such processes in the work of ENEF.
- Supporting better use of results of EU-funded research in this area.
- Continuing to improve the flow of information on and within ENEF.
- Strengthening distribution of information and transparency is key for the further development of a new nuclear governance in Europe. This implies to bring together all relevant partners: Member States, Parliaments, regulatory bodies, local communities as well as industry and NGOs.

The next plenary session of the European Nuclear Energy Forum will take place in Prague in May 2011.