

The sixth plenary meeting of the European Nuclear Energy Forum (ENEF) took place in Prague on 19 and 20 May 2011 and was hosted by the Czech government. 300 high-ranking participants discussed the safety and risks assessment of the nuclear power plants in the EU, challenges for investing in a low carbon electricity system and the transparency aspects involved.

The Forum was opened by the Czech Prime Minister, Petr Nečas, his Slovak counterpart, Iveta Radičová, and EU Commissioner Günther Oettinger, in the presence of Ministers, Members of the European Parliament, industry leaders as well as regulators and representatives of the civil society.

In the light of the nuclear accident of Fukushima, stock was taken of the post-accident reactions at European level, addressing the value added of national and European initiatives to continuously improve nuclear safety and, at a more general level, how nuclear energy can play a meaningful role within an overall energy policy aiming at a low carbon future.

Risks

ENEF gave the opportunity to learn about a set of positions and reactions to the Fukushima events. While there is an understanding that time will be necessary to draw all the lessons, ENEF insisted on the need to start without delay with a detailed accident analysis of which the findings and lessons learned should be fully implemented. ENEF welcomed Europe-wide comprehensive safety and risk assessments of all nuclear power plants. The Working Groups Risks presented its proposal for Safety Terms of Reference (STORE) which are discussed in the ongoing process especially with ENSREG. The results of such risk and safety assessments should form the basis of a possible revision of the existing legal nuclear safety framework. As such, ENEF supports the European Union's move to complete the framework for the highest standards of safety. This should include specifically aspects of licensing harmonisation, training of staff, accident management support and emergency preparedness.

Safety being a global public good, ENEF also addressed the need to improve nuclear safety at the international level.

Against this background, the Forum working group Risks could focus in particular on the following:

- Draw lessons from the stress tests for a reinforced nuclear safety framework in the European Union
- Guidance for reinforced international safety standards, using EU experience and best practices, in the context of initiatives in the G20 and the IAEA
- Guidance for the practical implementation of the proposed Directive on the management of spent fuel and radioactive waste; discussion on pros and cons of shared repositories
- Follow-up of Education and Training Initiatives at EU level, including in the area of nuclear safety, in cooperation with SNE-TP and identification of further initiatives where felt necessary.

Opportunities

ENEF discussed the contribution of nuclear to a low carbon electricity mix, pointing out the opportunities and threats in a long-term perspective. Nuclear power should not be looked at in isolation or in comparison with other generation sources, but the overall reliable and affordable supply of electricity to consumers via the electricity grid of the future is what is at stake. The particular need of stable conditions for financing the low carbon electricity system, a challenge not only for nuclear, was highlighted. Interventions from Member States wishing to introduce nuclear power, of vendors and operators of nuclear power plants showed that plans to use nuclear power for electricity generation have not been changed fundamentally after Fukushima. However to realise a low carbon future with nuclear energy it has been underlined that certainty is the key requirement at all levels of the investment chain and that appropriate financing instruments will be needed to overcome temporary financing hurdles and to encourage commercial banks to play a role in EU new built projects.

The Opportunities Working Group is invited to focus on the following issues in the coming months

- Further contribute to developing a clear vision of the 2050 perspective in support of the Commission's Energy Roadmap 2050 and Nuclear Indicative Programme (PINIC)
- Finalise phase 2 of the SWOT report covering opportunities and threats for nuclear until 2050, thereby integrating an in-depth analysis of the consequences of Fukushima
- Analyse electricity grid aspects and their consequences for the contribution of nuclear energy to the low carbon electricity mix of the future
- Keep an active dialogue with the Financial Institutions and the Commission to further develop and implement the recommendations of the Report on Financing
- In cooperation with the WG Risk, progress towards the harmonisation of licensing and reactor design approval at European level
- Keep an active dialogue with EESC to include the view of the civil society.

Transparency

ENEF welcomed that the Heads of State and Government insisted on making the results of the comprehensive safety and risk assessments and any necessary subsequent measures public, while fully respecting the security aspects involved. This will be an important measure to render these tests credible.

ENEF also welcomed the ongoing process organised 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 Forum also endorsed the organisation of the Spanish Energy Mix Forum (SEMF) to be launched this year by the Group of European Municipalities with Nuclear Facilities (GMF) in cooperation with the European Commission, the European and Economic Social Committee and Spanish partners involved in energy field.

Both the accident in Japan and the latest roundtable under this initiative showed how important it is to involve the public and to improve the flow of information generally, but particularly in the case of an accident.

Consequently, the Working Group Transparency should focus on:

- Contributing to assuring a transparent approach in the safety and risks assessments (stress tests) at European level;
- Analysing the way communication and exchange of information in the case of nuclear accidents in the EU are handled and potentially propose improvements;
- Further gathering, analysing and presenting good practices in Europe on nuclear governance and transparency, which 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; considering results from such processes in the work of ENEF.
- Continuing to improve the flow of information on and within ENEF.

The next plenary session of the European Nuclear Energy Forum will take place in Bratislava in May 2012.