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<Commission>{PETI}Committee on Petitions</Commission>

<Date>{17/05/2023}17.5.2023</Date>

<TitreType>NOTICE TO MEMBERS</TitreType>

Subject: <TITRE>Petition No 0710/2020 by Arvydas Sekmokas (Lithuanian) on the violation of environmental and nuclear safety law by the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets, Belarus

Petition No 0116/2021 by Ieva Budraitė (Lithuanian), on behalf of The Movement against Astravyets NPP, bearing 3 signatures, on the safety of the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets (Belarus)

Petition No 0267/2021 by P.A. (Lithuanian), on behalf of the Association”Movement against the Astravyets NPP”, with 12 073 signatures, on the need to stop the construction of the Astravyets nuclear power plant

Petition No 1108/2021 by A.P. (Polish) on the safety of the nuclear plant in Ostrovets, Belarus

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1. Summary of petition 0710/2020

The petitioner raises numerous concerns about the safety of the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets, Belarus, situated within a 45 km radius from Vilnius, LithuaniaHe points out that the Lithuanian Parliament adopted a Resolution calling for the EU to issue a legally binding decision on the threat of the Ostrovets' plant to the EU population and on action towards Belarus and Russia in this regard. The petitioner therefore calls on the European Parliament to confirm the infringements on EU law by the plant and to stop the project, until all required tests will be done. He asks for EU sanctions, such as the exclusion of Belarus from the Eastern partnership solidarity program, and calls on the Counil of the EU to ban the import of electricity produced by unsafe plants in countries neighbour to the European Union markets.

**Summary of petition 0116/2021**

The petitioner explains that the EU stresses the importance of highest nuclear safety standards in third countries, cross-border environmental matters and a level playing-field for European electricity producers. This is contradicted by the construction of the unsafe Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in the immediate proximity of the Lithuanian border, only 45 kilometres away from the capital Vilnius. Moreover, the Astravyets NPP built by the Russian ROSATOM corporation will expand the geopolitical influence of Russia and China. The petitioner therefore appeals to the Parliament to take an urgent action. A resolution should be adopted stating that the construction of reactor 1 was followed by numerous safety violations. In addition, the nuclear regulatory authorities of Belarus should be urged not to issue an operational licence for reactor 1 and to close the reactor or relocate it to another site. If further reactors are built, they should also be relocated. Furthermore, the Parliament should call on the Commission and the Council to express full solidarity with Lithuania and to adapt the EU laws regarding the trade of electricity accordingly. Also, sanctions against ROSATOM and other companies involved in the construction and trade of electricity produced by the Astravyets NPP should be considered. Finally, the electricity grid system of the Baltic States should be synchronised with the European continental network by 2025 at the latest.

**Summary of petition 0267/2021**

The petitioner condemns the construction of a nuclear power plant in the Astravyets, district of the Grodno region of Belarus. The plant is located 20 kilometres from the EU’s external border. The petitioner is appealing to the European Parliament’s Committee on Petitions to take immediate action against this unsafe nuclear power plant on the EU border in order to protect the lives and health of European citizens and also the lives of Belarusian citizens.

**Summary of petition 1108/2021**

The petitioner raises numerous concerns about the safety of the nuclear power plant in Ostrovets (BeINPP), Belarus, situated within a 45 km radius from Vilnius, Lithuania. The petition, which involves 1553 signatures, contains a call for sanctions to be imposed on companies supplying equipment to the power plan and requests the ban of the direct and indirect import as well as the mere transit of electricity produced in the Republic of Belarus until the international experts provide an assessment of the safety of the nuclear power plant.

2. Admissibility

Petition 0710/2020 was declared admissible on 12 October 2020.

Petition 0116/2021 was declared admissible on 19 May 2021.

Petition 0267/2021 was declared admissible on 18 June 2021.

Petition 1108/2021 was declared admissible on 25 February 2022.

Information requested from Commission under Rule 227(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 4 March 2022

Nuclear safety is a key priority for the Commission not only within the EU, but also globally. The Commission is therefore using all instruments at its disposal to ensure that the highest possible nuclear safety standards are respected in third countries, especially in neighbouring countries, also working through relevant international instances. The EU is wholly committed to calling upon Belarus to comply fully with the highest nuclear safety standards in the Astravyets nuclear power plant, to ensure regional safety and the safety of all EU citizens. This is of particular importance since the nuclear power plant in Astravyets is located on the border with Lithuania and close to its capital Vilnius.

Experts from the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG)[[1]](#footnote-1) and from the Commission have been reviewing the implementation of recommendations made by ENSREG in 2018 regarding the safety of the Astravyets nuclear power plant. Specifically, they have peer reviewed the adequacy and completeness of the national action plan that the Belarusian national regulator Gozatomnadzor published in August 2019, in response to the stress test recommendations made by the European experts. Despite the currently difficult political relations, the Commission and ENSREG were able to ensure continued engagement with Belarus in order to complete the review smoothly.

An interim report was published after its adoption by the ENSREG plenary on 3 March 2021[[2]](#footnote-2). The peer review team visited the Astravyets site for the second time at the beginning of September 2021, and their final peer review report was approved by the ENSREG plenary on 24 November 2021[[3]](#footnote-3). The ENSREG peer review was based upon close technical exchanges between the Belarusian nuclear regulator, GAN, and its EU peers.

The final ENSREG report assessed that 17 out of 22 of ENSREG’s original recommendations were fully implemented by Belarus at the time of the experts’ last visit and the remaining recommendations were being implemented. The Commission does not have information indicating that the recommendations which are not yet fully implemented would be safety-critical. Belarus subsequently submitted its updated national action plan to ENSREG, which will continue to monitor the plan and its implementation.

ENSREG also has processes in place for monitoring the implementation of countries’ stress test national action plans. After the approval of the final peer review report by ENSREG, Belarus, as an observer, is expected to participate in these monitoring processes and regularly submit progress reports to ENSREG.

The Commission would like to stress, however, that the safe operation of the plant is the responsibility of the operator, under the supervision of the national regulator. The Commissioner responsible for Energy has written to the Belarusian prime minister on 10 March 2021, stressing the importance of necessary safety improvements before any further decisions are taken on commissioning the plant. In response, the Belarusian prime minister has reaffirmed the commitment of Belarus to its voluntarily accepted commitments in respect of the peer review.

The Commission is also seeking to expand or formalise cooperation with Belarus in a number of critical nuclear safety cooperation platforms. Specifically, the Commission attaches high importance to speedy involvement of Belarus in the ECURIE arrangements[[4]](#footnote-4) for the rapid exchange of information on nuclear or radiological emergencies – to which a number of neighbouring countries, such as Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland and the Republic of North Macedonia, have signed up. Extending ECURIE to Belarus would enable Member States and the Commission to have early access to information about such events, and to directly exchange technical information with the Belarusian competent authorities.

The Commission is also seeking to formalise the participation of Belarus in EURDEP[[5]](#footnote-5), used to exchange radiological monitoring data.

Following a series of negotiations facilitated by the Commission, the three Baltic States agreed at the end of August 2020 on a joint approach to the implementation of a commercial electricity regime with third countries until the synchronisation of the Baltic States with the continental grid is accomplished. The agreed approach takes into account the nuclear safety concerns as well as the need to maintain the energy security of the Baltic States. Energy imports from Astravyets were stopped on 3 November 2020.

The Commission has facilitated discussions among the Baltic States aimed at putting into practice, in line with EU law, the shared political aims of maintaining energy security while taking into account nuclear safety concerns.

More generally, the synchronisation of the energy grids of the Baltic States with the continental European network by the end of 2025 is a high priority for the achievement of regional energy security and overall European Green Deal[[6]](#footnote-6) objectives. The Commission has been continuously supporting the implementation of this priority project. The relevant grid reinforcements are included in the EU list of Projects of Common Interest (PCIs), are priority projects for the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) High-level Group, and the Commission is providing financial assistance, already exceeding EUR 1.2 billion euros. The synchronisation process will permanently end the dependence on third countries concerning both electricity trade and system operation.

Conclusion

The Commission and ENSREG will continue to monitor the implementation of the remaining recommendations of the ENSREG peer review report and the implementation of the national action plan until its full implementation by Belarus, and will continue its efforts to ensure continued engagement with Belarus on nuclear safety issues. In addition, the Commission will continue to offer strong support to the implementation of the Baltic synchronisation project in a timely manner while taking into account energy security considerations and ensuring compliance with EU law.

4. Commission reply (REV), received on 17 May 2023

Petitions 0710/2020, 0116/2021, 0267/2021 and 1108/21

The Commission’s observations

Nuclear safety is a key priority for the Commission not only within the EU, but also globally. The Commission is therefore using all instruments at its disposal to ensure that the highest possible nuclear safety standards are respected in third countries, especially in neighbouring countries, also working through relevant international instances. The EU has been consistently calling upon Belarus to comply fully with the highest nuclear safety standards in the Astravyets nuclear power plant, to ensure regional safety and the safety of all EU citizens. This is of particular importance since the nuclear power plant in Astravyets is located near the border with Lithuania and close to its capital Vilnius.

Experts from the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG)[[7]](#footnote-7) and from the Commission have been reviewing the implementation of the 2018 ENSREG recommendations on the safety of the Astravyets nuclear power plant. Specifically, they have peer reviewed the adequacy and completeness of the national action plan that the Belarusian national regulator Gozatomnadzor published in August 2019. Despite the difficult political relations already at the time, the Commission and ENSREG were able to ensure continued engagement with Belarus in order to complete the review smoothly.

An interim report was published after its adoption by the ENSREG plenary on 3 March 2021[[8]](#footnote-8). The peer review team visited the Astravyets site for a second time at the beginning of September 2021, and their final peer review report was approved by the ENSREG plenary on 24 November 2021[[9]](#footnote-9). The ENSREG peer review was based upon close technical exchanges between the Belarusian nuclear regulator, GAN, and its EU peers.

The final ENSREG report assessed that 17 out of 22 of ENSREG’s original recommendations were fully implemented by Belarus at the time of the experts’ last visit and the remaining recommendations were being implemented. Belarus subsequently submitted its updated national action plan to ENSREG. ENSREG intended to continue monitoring the implementation of the national action plan and remaining recommendations and expected Belarus to participate.

Following Belarus’s fraudulent elections in August 2020, the ensuing repression and its complicity in the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, Commission’s engagement with Belarus’s public bodies and state-owned enterprises, including at technical level, has been suspended, with very limited exceptions. Accordingly, ENSREG also suspended Belarus’s participation in ENSREG as an Observer[[10]](#footnote-10). It is, however, still possible for Belarus to report on the stress test national action plan.

The Commission would like to stress that the safe operation of the plant is the responsibility of the operator, under the supervision of the national regulator. To recall that the Commissioner responsible for Energy had written to the Belarusian Prime Minister on 10 March 2021, stressing the importance of necessary safety improvements before any further decisions are taken on commissioning the plant. In response, the Belarusian Prime Minister has reaffirmed the commitment of Belarus to its voluntarily accepted commitments in respect of the peer review.

Prior to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the Commission had been seeking to expand or formalise cooperation with Belarus in a number of critical nuclear safety cooperation platforms. Specifically, the Commission attaches high importance to speedy involvement of Belarus in the ECURIE arrangements[[11]](#footnote-11) for the rapid exchange of information on nuclear or radiological emergencies – to which a number of neighbouring countries, such as Montenegro, Norway, Switzerland and the Republic of North Macedonia, have signed up. Extending ECURIE to neighbouring states enables Member States and the Commission to have early access to information about such events, and to directly exchange technical information with the competent authorities of these states.

The Commission had also been seeking to formalise the participation of Belarus in EURDEP[[12]](#footnote-12), used to exchange radiological monitoring data. These efforts have been put on hold for the time being but should be pursued once the geopolitical environment thus allows.

Following a series of negotiations facilitated by the Commission, the three Baltic States agreed already at the end of August 2020 on a joint approach to the implementation of a commercial electricity regime with third countries until the synchronisation of the Baltic States with the continental grid is accomplished. The agreed approach took into account nuclear safety concerns as well as the need to maintain the energy security of the Baltic States. Commercial electricity exchanges from Astravyets into the EU were stopped on 3 November 2020.

The Commission has facilitated discussions among the Baltic States aimed at putting into practice, in line with EU law, the shared political aims of maintaining energy security while taking into account nuclear safety concerns.

More recently, following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, commercial electricity exchanges between Russia and the Baltic States have also stopped.

More generally, the synchronisation of the energy grids of the Baltic States with the continental European network by the end of 2025 is a high priority for the achievement of regional energy security and overall European Green Deal[[13]](#footnote-13) objectives. The Commission has been continuously supporting the implementation of this priority project. The relevant grid reinforcements are included in the EU list of Projects of Common Interest (PCIs), are priority projects for the Baltic Energy Market Interconnection Plan (BEMIP) High-level Group, and the Commission is providing financial assistance, already exceeding EUR 1.2 billion euros. The synchronisation process will permanently end the dependence on third countries concerning both commercial electricity exchanges and system operation.

Conclusion

As far as the situation following the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine allows, the Commission and ENSREG will continue to monitor the implementation of the remaining recommendations of the ENSREG peer review report and of the national action plan until its full implementation by Belarus, taking into account that all engagement with the Belarusian authorities was suspended, including in the field of nuclear safety.

In addition, the Commission will continue to offer strong support to the implementation of the Baltic synchronisation project in a timely manner while taking into account energy security considerations and ensuring compliance with EU law.

1. ENSREG is an independent, expert advisory group created in 2007. It is composed of senior officials from the national nuclear safety, radioactive waste safety or radiation protection regulatory authorities and senior civil servants with competence in these fields from all Member States in the European Union and representatives of the Commission. Its role is to help to establish the conditions for continuous improvement and to reach a common understanding in the areas of nuclear safety and radioactive waste management. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.ensreg.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/preliminary_eu_peer_review_report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.ensreg.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/final_eu_peer_review_report_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The ECURIE arrangements have created the ECURIE system that is the official notification system of the Commission through which Member States are obliged to notify and send relevant information in case of radiological/nuclear accident. This system is open to non-EU countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. EURDEP provides a platform by which automatic monitoring data are continuously exchanged in a standardised way between the Commission and 25 European countries. It is fully integrated in the ECURIE procedures. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ENSREG is an independent, expert advisory group created in 2007. It is composed of senior officials from the national nuclear safety, radioactive waste safety or radiation protection regulatory authorities and senior civil servants with competence in these fields from all Member States in the European Union and representatives of the Commission. Its role is to help to establish the conditions for continuous improvement and to reach a common understanding in the areas of nuclear safety and radioactive waste management. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.ensreg.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/preliminary_eu_peer_review_report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.ensreg.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/final_eu_peer_review_report_0.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On 24 March 2022, in its 48th meeting, ENSREG took the decision to suspend Belarus’s observership in ENSREG until further notice. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The ECURIE arrangements have created the ECURIE system that is the official notification system of the Commission through which Member States are obliged to notify and send relevant information in case of radiological/nuclear accident. This system is open to non-EU countries. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. EURDEP provides a platform by which automatic monitoring data are continuously exchanged in a standardised way between the Commission and 25 European countries. It is fully integrated in the ECURIE procedures. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)