

Resolution of the Committee of the Regions on 'Nuclear Safety and Local/Regional Democracy'

(98/C 251/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the final declaration of the European Conference on Nuclear Safety and Local/Regional Democracy held in Gothenburg on 24, 25 and 26 June 1997;

having regard to its decisions on 10 December 1997 and 18 February 1998 instructing Commission 4 (Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy, the Environment) to draw up a resolution on the final declaration of the European Conference on Nuclear Safety and Local/Regional Democracy held in Gothenburg on 24, 25 and 26 June 1997;

having regard to the draft resolution (CdR 423/97 rev 2) adopted by Commission 4 at its meeting on 12 December 1997 (rapporteur: Mr Soulsby),

has adopted by majority the following resolution at its 23rd plenary session on 13 and 14 May 1998 (meeting of 14 May).

1. The Committee of the Regions, having heard the evidence, without taking a position for or against nuclear energy, are convinced that there are legitimate and serious concerns about public health because of the environmental radiation which is caused by radioactive fall-out from nuclear accidents, and which can be caused by the processes of nuclear power generation, discharges from nuclear waste storage, processing and reprocessing of nuclear fuel.

2. The Committee of the Regions supports the precautionary principle which should guide decision making, because it takes account of the needs of future generations.

3. The Committee of the Regions endorses the requirements of the Rio Declaration covering participation in environmental decisions and information on the environment including hazardous materials which established that:

'Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous material and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.'

4. The Committee of the Regions believes that there is an urgent need to strengthen democratic and participatory processes for planning and operating nuclear facilities so as to involve all concerned social groups at the local, regional, national and international levels. In order to give this effect, the opinions of local and

regional authorities should be fully taken into account. To achieve this the following requirements will need to be met:

A) *Transparency*

All available information and proposals relating to the siting, construction, operation and decommissioning of nuclear facilities should be detailed, accurate reliable and openly presented by both operators and regulatory authorities to the local and regional authorities concerned, including authorities in neighbouring countries and those affected by the transportation of radioactive materials.

B) *Participation*

The decision-making process for the siting of nuclear facilities as well as for nuclear waste management and disposal sites should involve local and all other citizens concerned. The local or regional authority should be given the final decision on whether a facility should be accepted or not. The decision should be based on the best available information. Power plants and waste management facilities must be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment, which, if correctly utilized, offers the possibility of public information, increased participation and the consideration of alternatives.

C) *Financial support*

Actual and potentially affected authorities should receive financial support from central government and/or the operator or operators of the nuclear facilities, thus

enabling them to properly participate in decision-making processes relating to nuclear facilities (an expression intended throughout this resolution to include nuclear waste management and disposal sites.)

D) *Economic Assessment*

The siting and construction of new facilities should be subjected to regional economic assessment and draft development plans for public comment. Future and existing facilities should be measured against employment and economic criteria which take into account the need to avoid excessive industrial and social dependence on the facility, making its closure difficult. The local and regional economic damage that will be caused by the closure of nuclear power plants approaching the end of their useful life should be avoided, for example by replacing these with thermal or electrical power plants that use renewable sources. This would capitalise upon the skills and experience of the staff in the thermo-nuclear plants.

5. The Committee of the Regions believes that consideration should be given to the creation of local liaison arrangements which are broadly based and involve representatives from; local and regional authorities, social networks, operators and regulators of nuclear facilities and other specially concerned groups, such as citizens associations, environmental NGOs and medical scientists, which should provide a suitable forum for public participation if placed on an independent statutory basis. Their primary duty should be watching over the safety measures at nuclear facilities, gathering the relevant information, informing the public about safety issues and taking part in emergency planning.

6. Such committees would be accountable to the local and regional authorities. Other democratic forms like local, regional or national referendums should be organized to enable people to express their opinion on plans for existing or future nuclear facilities.

7. At the international level the Committee of the Regions recognizes that rights to information and participation should be implemented under the proposed ECE Convention⁽¹⁾ with a right of cheap admin-

istrative appeal and access to a higher judicial review process.

8. The Committee of the Regions considers that there is a need for improved coordination of European organizations concerned with nuclear safety. The procedures adopted should guarantee the effective control and safety of nuclear installations in the member states of the Council of Europe in an impartial way with full independence from energy producers.

9. The Committee of the Regions confirms that within the European Union nuclear policy should be compatible with the overall principles of environmental and health policies and ensure freedom of access to environmental information by amending the current directive governing such access to ensure that nuclear utilities are not exempt, that health and safety information is included and exemptions from access are narrowed⁽²⁾.

10. The Committee of the Regions believes that transfrontier cooperation between national and regional authorities and local liaison committees is essential to protect their populations against nuclear risks and damage caused by nuclear emissions and to ensure that people living near the border have the necessary access to information; and recognizes the problems facing central and eastern Europe arising from the upgrading of the safety of outmoded reactors; and considers that whilst current emphasis lies on technological improvements and development of legislation on nuclear activities, there is also an urgent need to develop democratic participatory processes for decision-making on future energy alternatives.

11. The Committee of the Regions considers that many of the issues relating to the consideration of proposals for disposal of radioactive waste are complex and not subject to widespread public understanding and for this reason believes that it is crucial to ensure access to all relevant information to the public, to involve local and regional authorities and the public in decision-making and to seek public confidence in the principles that govern the safety of repositories and in waste management programmes.

12. The Committee of the Regions acknowledges that future safety issues will relate to the closure and decommissioning of nuclear facilities. For local and

⁽¹⁾ This refers to the Economic Commission for Europe Convention on 'Access to Environmental Information and Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making' currently being negotiated by, inter alia, representatives of the European Union and due for signature at the 4th Environment for Europe Ministerial Meeting in June 1998 at Aarhus, Denmark.

⁽²⁾ This refers to EC Directive 90/313/EEC on the Freedom of Access to Information on the Environment currently being reviewed by the European Commission with a view to its amendment.

regional authorities this problem will create potential safety hazards, job losses and the loss of tax revenues with possible recession in local business activities. The

principle of transparency access to information and public participation in decision making is made ever more essential in these circumstances.

Brussels, 14 May 1998.

The Chairman
of the Committee of the Regions
Manfred DAMMEYER

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Demographic situation in the European Union'

(98/C 251/07)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Demographic Report 1997⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the decision of 18 September 1997, in accordance with the fourth paragraph of Article 198c of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to issue an opinion on this subject and to instruct Commission 8 for Economic and Social Cohesion, Social Policy and Public Health to prepare it;

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 388/97 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 8 on 27 November 1997 (rapporteur: Mr Roscam Abbing),

adopted the following opinion at its 23rd plenary session on 13 and 14 May 1998 (meeting of 14 May).

Introduction

In 1994 for the first time the European Commission published a report on the demographic situation in the European Union⁽²⁾. It contained mainly general statistics.

In 1995, the Commission's demographic report⁽³⁾ was centred around the theme of demographic ageing and its consequences. The committee of social affairs of the European Parliament appointed Mrs Boogerd Quaak (ELDR, NL) as rapporteur. Her report was adopted by the European Parliament in March 1997⁽⁴⁾. The main

aim of the EP rapporteur was to draw the attention of the policy makers to the importance of the demographic factor in many policy areas, like: economic policies, labour market policies, social security, public health, regional policy, environmental policies, etc. Mrs Boogerd-Quaak stated: '...policy makers do not usually give this factor much consideration. Current policy is often based on the assumption that the demographic structure of the population is a static factor, and consequently policy measures may prove to be ineffective in the long term'.

⁽¹⁾ COM(97) 361 final.

⁽²⁾ COM(94) 595 final.

⁽³⁾ COM(96) 60 final: The demographic situation in the European Union 1995.

⁽⁴⁾ A4-0042/97 (PE 218.695): Report of the EP on the Commission's report on the demographic situation in the European Union 1995 adopted on 14.3.1997, rapporteur: Mrs Boogerd-Quaak (Social Affairs Committee). OJ C 115, 14.4.1997, p. 238.

Awareness for the issue is growing only slowly. The first ones to ring the alarm bells on demographic ageing were insurance companies and pension funds, who foresaw considerable difficulties in the not so very remote future, regarding the financing of old age pensions. By now, the demographic factor appears in