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Nuclear energy and sustainable development

Motion for a recommendation
presented by Mr Lengagne and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

Nuclear energy currently accounts for almost 17% of total production of electricity worldwide, with 23% in OECD countries, 14% of total energy consumption in the European Union and 30% of EU electricity. Moreover, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Lithuania is the European country which is most dependent on nuclear energy, 81% of its total electricity being produced by nuclear power stations, with France coming in second place, at 78%.

Oil, coal and gas provide for two-thirds of total energy and electricity production, but they also cause the greenhouse gases which are responsible for global warming, as pointed out by the Assembly in Resolution 1435 on energy systems and the environment.

Nevertheless, all the forecasts on world energy demand in fifty years time agree that there will be an enormous increase as compared with present consumption levels, particularly in the developing regions of the world, which are increasingly integrating into the world economy. Energy consumption is expected to double by the year 2050, with CO² emissions also doubling over the same period.

The challenge facing these emerging economies will be to ensure the economic and social development linked to their growth while at the same time reinforcing environmental protection and optimising existing resources. Diversification, supply security, environmental protection and technological development are all factors which must be taken into account by governments in order to cope with this challenge, which is also bound up with globalisation.

Nuclear energy is one of the most important alternatives to fossil energies, potentially providing a major contribution to world energy supplies, but it still raises a great many questions among both political decision-makers and the community at large.

The Council of Europe member States must consider a European energy policy taking account of the major issues raised by nuclear energy, including safety of installations, processing of radioactive waste, the potential contribution of nuclear energy to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the economics of the fuel cycle and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This is particularly important as nuclear energy cannot be considered a renewable energy, given that uranium reserves are also limited.

On 10 January 2007 the European Commission proposed a package of measures relevant to the energy field and climate change in order to reduce emissions for the 21st century, leaving it to the individual member States to decide whether or not to use nuclear energy to produce electricity.

The governments of the Council of Europe member States are facing new energy choices in order to meet growing demands. Possible increased use of nuclear energy based on new technical and scientific analyses must be envisaged and evaluated in accordance with national needs, but also with a view to global sustainable development.

Europe must also reduce its dependence on fossil fuels for energy, which was one of the conclusions of the Assembly debate on the danger of using energy supplies as an instrument of political pressure (Doc. 11116).

The Assembly must ponder whether nuclear energy can be harnessed without unacceptable risks, and how far it can contribute to the sustainable development of our societies.

The Assembly wishes to study nuclear power, weighing up its advantages and disadvantages in order to be able to make proposals on the subject.

The Assembly recommends that the national Parliaments organise parliamentary debates on this subject, with a view to studying the issue in detail, bringing all the various points of view expressed in the community into the discussions.

*Signed*¹:

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EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democratic Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left
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