Parliamentary **Assembly**
Assemblée parlementaire

Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 10761 rev.
12 December 2005

Emissions from the Sellafield nuclear plant

Written question No 471 to the Committee of Ministers

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 950th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (7 December 2005)

I. Written Question No. 471 by Mr Hagberg (Doc. 10591)

The world should act to persuade the United Kingdom to reduce emissions of plutonium at the Sellafield nuclear plant. The background to these problems is that in August 2004 the Sellafield plant was given permission to increase its plutonium emissions to 700 GBq. Plutonium emits radioactive alpha radiation which, in the worst case, can destroy the genetic material of both human beings and animals.

The need to reduce emissions in Sellafield has become a burning issue once more. According to reports, on 18 April there was a leak of over 20 tonnes of nitric acid containing uranium and plutonium. Of this the plutonium alone was reported to have amounted to around 200 kg.

We are now living in a time of growing global environmental problems for which we all must take responsibility. The British nuclear plant in Sellafield constitutes an important part of European energy production. At the same time, European governments have an important role to play when it comes to preventing radioactive emissions all over our continent. The concern that many people have about nuclear power is often based on how we deal with radioactive waste.

In the light of the above,

I would like to ask the Committee of Ministers,

Which measures it intends to take in order to persuade the British Government to reduce radioactive emissions at the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant.

II. Reply by the Committee of Ministers

The Committee of Ministers has taken note with interest of Written Question No. 471 concerning emissions from the Sellafield nuclear plant (United Kingdom) and would like to recall that the Council of Europe, while lacking precise competence in the field of nuclear safety and security, is committed to improving environment protection as well as the quality of life of European citizens. In this respect, the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government has encouraged our Organisation to support integrated policies in the field of environment and prevention of natural disasters and technological accidents. The Council of Europe supports the standards and expert guidance elaborated in the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) aimed at protecting people and the environment from the possible harmful effects of radiation emitted from nuclear power stations. In this context, the Committee of Ministers notes the United Kingdom's assurances that it follows the precautionary approach concerning emissions from the Sellafield nuclear plant, and that emissions are below approved international standards. The Committee of Ministers was informed by the United Kingdom that the incident referred to, which came to light on 18 April, did not involve any release of radioactivity to the environment.