

Nuclear waste - more rights for the affected villages in Czech Republic

Important amendment to the „atomic law“

The proposal for an amendment to the Czech „atomic law“ was originally drafted by the senator Jitka Seitlova in cooperation with several NGOs. The amendment would give the municipalities the right to join decision-making in the siting processes of nuclear facilities, increase the ceiling of financial liability for potential nuclear damages and guarantee the municipalities around nuclear facilities financial compensation for the economic losses resulting from their close vicinity.

The proposal has been frozen for one year at the beginning of the legislative process (in the Senate) in May 2004 until "implications of its contents have been considered in more detail by experts" and also because "the EU [was] expected to decide on its policy towards management of nuclear waste in its member states".

Senators had to come back to the proposal in spring 2005. The plenary session of the Senate has returned the proposal to the Senate committees.

Later on, the committees responded with mixed conclusions – „**industrial committee**“ recommended NOT to adopt the proposal, „**environmental committee**“ recommended YES but to a version cut in several important points, „**committee for EU legislation and affairs**“ couldn't agree on any clear recommendation.

In this point, before another plenary session of the Senate and the final vote, two NGOs - **Hnutí DUHA - Friends of the Earth Czech Republic** and **CALLA Association** helped to organize a joint letter to the Senators by almost **40 mayors of villages** situated in the localities, chosen as potential sites for long-term deep geological repository for high-level wastes. The mayors urged the Senators to support the amendment because it „gives the local people, who are most affected, at least some basic democratic rights“ (to take part in decision-making process).

In the end, the amendment was adopted by large margin in the Senate, - a positive, but not satisfactory step towards transparent and democratic process. The final version of the proposal adopted by the Senate preserves several strong democratic deficits as well as hidden economical support for the producers of nuclear wastes.

Moreover, in order to come into force, the amendment must now be passed also by the Czech Parliament. MPs are expected to vote (in the first round) on the proposal in December 2005. If they refuse to deal with the proposal, it

will mean an end of the whole process. If they support it now, the proposal is accepted for detailed debates in the parliamentary committees. Final vote which could put the amendment into legal force can be expected only at the beginning of the next year, in an optimistic situation.

Again, almost 40 mayors have urged, in a joint letter, the MPs to support the amendment. While it is not yet clear whether MPs are prepared to at least let the (already weakened) proposal go into committees, NGOs are preparing to return some of the clauses of the original amendment back into the current version. Such a chance might come during debates and in the recommendations of the parliamentary committees.

Research for deep geological repository (DGR)

In February 2004, the Czech Minister of Industry, Milan Urban, publicly announced the "halt of all research activities concerning the DGR in the Czech Republic". Urbans announcement resulted from pressure due to the local referenda in all localities chosen for geological research in which large majorities of people refused any activities connected to research or siting of the Deep Geological Repository (DGR) in their region.

As an alternative option, Urban mentioned efforts to find a common solution on the EU level. Nevertheless his announcement was rather a tactical step in order to temporarily calm down the rising opposition towards his energy policy proposal and towards the research policy of the Czech *Radioactive Wastes Repository Authority* (SURAO).

SURAO has consequently suspended all future field geological research for 5 years. Anyway, during 2004 and 2005, SURAO has finished its first stage of narrowing the previously chosen localities - from area of over 200 km² down to 40 km² together for all the 6 explored localities. This narrowing was based on aerial geological research plus other data.

In the meantime SURAO continues other research and PR activities. It signed a „memorandum on co-operation“ with 4 municipalities in one of the explored localities – Rohozna. Anyway, as it later turned out, some of the mayors had not consulted their consent with all members of the village council and with the public. Therefore the mayor of Cejle has later, under pressure by local people, revoked his signature and withdraw his village from the memorandum. In another village, Batelov, 7 out of 15 members of the village council have resigned their position in protest against the mayor's signature on the memorandum.

Transmutation technology ??

SURAO has been investing part of its budget into „research of transmutation technologies“ too.

Thus Czech republic is, together with Italy, among the only two European countries, who finance such a research from their national budget. It's the more interesting as SURAO generally proposes in its statements and materials deep geological repository as the only serious option for dealing with the wastes. Interest in transmutation is explained by a SURAO official as follows: *„...from SURAO's point of view this [research into transmutation technologies] is only an additional research to the problematics of nuclear wastes management and is not prospective in future implementation of concrete facilities in the Czech conditions. But financing of this research allows SURAO to maintain professional level in one area connected with the management of radioactive wastes.“*

In November 2005 the Czech government agreed to an updated long-term plan of SURAO's activities. The plan confirms the intention to resume the geological research once again in 2010. Anyway, more than a real decision, it rather is yet another vague political proclamation of the government, which doesn't really wish to get caught into a need to decide about such a controversial issue as the management of the (Czech) spent nuclear fuel is.

Interim storage facility in Temelin gets two important approvals

In late November, the Czech Ministry of Environment has concluded that the project of interim storage facility at Temelin, the operation of which CEZ plans to start in 2014, will not bring any negative impact to the surrounding environment or inhabitants. Few days later, the European Commission in Brussels has identified itself with this conclusion and added that the facility therefore can't harm any inhabitants of the neighbouring countries.

CEZ, the operator of Temelin, is now going to submit these conclusions to the State Office of Nuclear Safety (SUJB). SUJB is then responsible to give its own binding opinion about the facility. It is expected to be positive based on previous experiences with the office.

Several local NGOs as well as NGOs from neighbouring Austria have been criticising the plan, claiming that the project is not technically sound and up-to-date. The facility should be able to store 1370 t of high-level wastes which the Temelin NPP is expected to produce in the next 30 years. It should then store the wastes for 60 years.