



ETUC Resolution

Nuclear energy: safety, security and democratic control

Adopted at the Executive Committee on 28-29 June 2011

Following the dramatic events in Japan, at Fukushima, some EU member states have decided to abandon the use of nuclear power or have taken concrete steps to start phasing it out, while others intend to continue using nuclear power facilities.

The ETUC confirms and does not question the fact that under the EU Treaties any decision on a country's specific energy mix, including the use of nuclear energy, is a matter for the individual sovereign state. The ETUC will therefore refrain from taking a position on the future of nuclear energy, recognizing that a number of countries have decided to withdraw from nuclear power or put in place moratoriums. The ETUC demands that, regardless of the choice of each member state, nuclear safety and security be strongly reinforced, and calls for a democratic public debate on the future of the European energy policy, involving all stakeholders (trade unions, enterprises, political parties, social groups).

These demands were already stressed in the ETUC's December 2010 Resolution on Energy Strategy for Europe in which the ETUC reaffirmed, among other things:

- The need for a common European energy policy of general interest to be promoted by a democratically controlled European Energy Agency,
- The need to diversify the energy sources by developing renewable energies and other low CO₂ emitting alternatives such as combined heat and power,
- The urgency to increase energy savings and energy efficiency in the industry, building and transport sectors, with binding European targets,
- The need for a European energy solidarity pact reinforcing the European cooperation which would go beyond merely coordinated but fragmented national markets, with a strong role for public authorities,

These demands remain central to tackling the current absence of a coherent and sustainable European energy policy. This resolution complements the earlier broader resolution and provides a more detailed perspective on the current EU policy towards nuclear safety and security.

Fukushima has shown that there cannot be zero risk when it comes to the nuclear industry and its supply chain, as it is the case for all industries. Moreover, recognising the scale of risks for the general public as well as the specific risks for nuclear industry workers, the ETUC demands that this industry be treated with the highest possible caution, transparency and democratic control, whilst recognising that other industries

also involve risks that need to be addressed.

Above all, the ETUC extends its sympathy to those affected by the catastrophe in Japan. We insist that the general public be protected against radiation damage. Workers' exposure to radiation must be as limited as possible and when exposed to radiation, workers must be fully treated for health concerns and generously compensated. This compensation should also be extended to victims' families.

In a nuclear accident, the first victims are always the nuclear industry and plant level workers, who sacrifice their health and even their lives in order to reduce the risks for others. For Fukushima, as for Chernobyl previously, the formerly densely-populated areas up to 30 km around the power plants will now be uninhabitable for decades or even centuries. No adequate insurance protection exists for this scale of human and material damage. Liabilities for the companies involved have to be raised considerably to prevent that the costs of cleaning up, in the case of an accident, fall disproportionately on the general population.

Without entering into the current national debate on the future of nuclear energy, the ETUC stresses that one of the lessons learnt from Fukushima and Chernobyl is that radiation does not respect national boundaries. Therefore, Europe must have high and uniform safety standards for the operation of nuclear power plants and the storage of depleted fuel rods and other waste, taking into account natural, technological, terrorist, aviation and human risks. It is the responsibility of the EU to ensure the highest possible level of safety and security in Europe by pushing member states to enforce standards in order to avoid nuclear accidents and to minimize the consequences in case of accidents. This means that the following should be guaranteed:

1. Planned stress tests, audits and safety inspections of all nuclear power plants and facilities including storage (civilian and military) in the EU must be conducted on the basis of the latest scientific and engineering knowledge and standards. The tests should take into account the human factor (work organisation and conditions, subcontracting). All reactors must be transparently tested, audited and reviewed by independent nuclear control authorities. In case of failure, public authorities must ensure that the failed facilities are stopped immediately, to be decommissioned, retrofitted or refurbished, subject to further tests. The ETUC urges the EU and member states to publicly publish the results of these stress tests and audits, ensuring high standards of public information and communication.
2. Increased efforts in research and engineering, the development of public authorities' powers to control the industry, and the need to ensure security and the safety of the workforce (throughout the life cycle) and the general public, should take precedence over profitability in industry thinking. High and equal safety provisions for nuclear facilities are also crucial to ensure fair competition. This should be achieved without delay. For public security, it is unacceptable that operators use inadequate safety provisions to achieve a competitive advantage. Safety standards must be laid down internationally, and where necessary, at European level, existing international standards must be tightened up.
3. Workforce whistleblowers raising safety concerns on plants must be protected from reprisals. Furthermore, the views of workers should be taken into account, since they have the clearest view on the industrial reality in nuclear plants and facilities.

4. Action is urgently needed to guarantee clear and coherent social and employment management in the sector and its supply chain. To reinforce security in the industry, the working conditions of all workers regardless of contract or task must be maintained at a high level. Subcontracting and agency work should be tightly limited and if used, workers must enjoy the same protection as regular employees, particularly in terms of training, health and safety protection, working conditions and pay. The ETUC calls on the EU to publish national and plant level data on subcontracting and agency work in the nuclear power sector. The ETUC is deeply concerned that work organisation in the nuclear industry in Europe is increasingly dominated by large-scale use of subcontracting, (in some cases) inadequate training, dangerous exposure levels for the workers concerned, and in all likelihood a consequent loss of reliable control over the most critical stages of processes. Moreover, ensuring the working conditions of those in the global supply chain, especially the extractive, mining and waste management industries, must be addressed by governments and the industry.

5. Trade unions and work place representatives should be informed and consulted on the conduct of the nuclear stress test in their company, allowing additional expertise when required. The results of the stress test and especially the conclusions which are drawn are to be presented to the unions and workplace representatives. In case decisions are taken to close power stations, adequate measures are to be considered with the trade unions to protect employment and to ensure long-term investment in a skilled force to deal with decommissioning continuing to guarantee the highest levels of security and health and safety protection.

This is particularly crucial in light of the opening-up of the electricity market. This may prove to be incompatible with the demands of security and the risks inherent in nuclear energy, insofar as this technology demands utter transparency, very strict regulation and optimum social conditions. Experience shows that these public requirements cannot be guaranteed in a liberalised market. Full transparency on the real costs must be ensured and submitted to a publicly accountable European Energy Agency to be created, as proposed in the ETUC resolution on a energy strategy for Europe (December 2010).

We also insist on the importance of maintaining and bolstering the skills necessary for the full lifespan of these power plants, in the decommissioning phase and in waste management, etc.

Finally, the pursuit of research into the effects of radiation should be stepped up. While, making nuclear plants safer for those countries that have included nuclear in their energy mix requires a step-change in democratic accountability based upon transparency and a high level of information. Elements to address would include more efficient plants, reduced exposure to natural as well as terrorist risks, lenient uranium consumption, and better development of nuclear waste management, which is currently lacking.

Taking into account the fact that improving security systems will increase the investment costs and extend the construction time of nuclear power plants, steps should be taken so as to ensure the security of energy supply, energy independence and affordability for workers and industries, while protecting the most vulnerable.