

Extended life for Dutch nuclear plant shows first sign of policy rethink

Brussels, 12 January 2006: FORATOM, the trade association representing the European nuclear industry, welcomes the recent decision of the Dutch government to grant a 20-year lifetime extension for the nuclear power plant (NPP) at Borssele, in the country's south western province of Zeeland. It sees the decision to extend the operational lifetime of the 449-megawatt pressurized water reactor (PWR) plant to 2033 (beyond the originally scheduled closure date of 2013) as evidence of a growing realization among countries with a nuclear phase-out policy that nuclear power offers the best solution to the ongoing problems of security of supply, climate change and rising energy costs.

The recent announcement by the Dutch government to extend until December 2033 the lifetime of the Netherlands' only operational reactor unit, at Borssele, follows the agreement that was signed in February 2005 to increase the annual generating capacity of the plant by at least 30 megawatts from 2006. The new agreement includes three conditions that must be satisfied: the operating company EPZ, together with the two companies that own it (Delta and Essent) must invest around €250 million in projects aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions in the Netherlands, in particular initiatives to promote energy efficiency, clean fossil fuels and renewables; it must retain its status among the "top 25 safest nuclear reactors in the EU, the US and Canada" and the plant must be dismantled as soon as possible in 2033.

The three-party Dutch coalition government that rubber-stamped the agreement includes the D66 (Democraten 66) Party, which had previously stuck to its anti-nuclear agenda. By supporting the decision to extend the lifetime of the Borssele NPP, D66 signaled a significant shift in its thinking on nuclear energy. Commenting on the Dutch government's announcement, Dr. Peter Haug, President of FORATOM, said: "It is a welcome development that must be viewed within the wider context of ongoing efforts to find a sustainable solution to the problems of security of supply, climate change and rising energy costs. The Netherlands is the first country to actively question its own nuclear phase-out policy. This reflects a growing tendency amongst countries with a phase-out policy to reconsider it in light of the increasingly-recognized contribution that nuclear energy, as part of an overall energy mix, can make to ensure a secure supply of environmentally-friendly and affordable energy. "

Countries are struggling to meet their CO₂ reduction commitments and the problems of over-dependence upon gas imports and guaranteeing energy supplies persist - as witnessed by the recent crisis between Russia and the Ukraine. Other countries like Germany, Sweden and Belgium are showing signs that they may follow the Netherlands' lead and review their current policy. Phasing out nuclear energy is becoming less and less of an option.

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