



European electricity industry joint position, December 2011

Security and Safety in the Nuclear Industry

Introduction

The earthquake and following tsunami that hit Japan on 11 March 2011 have shocked the world. They have caused tremendous human suffering and material damage. The European social partners for the electricity industry have expressed their deep-felt sympathy to the Japanese people and to the Japanese power industry and have followed with concern the impact of these events on the nuclear power stations of Fukushima Daiichi, owned by the Japanese company TEPCO¹.

The Fukushima events raised public awareness on the direct impact which incidents in nuclear power stations might have on the health and safety of the workers concerned, whether they are employed in the power stations, active in emergency and disaster prevention services or acting as subcontractors. Their work has been absolutely crucial to prevent a deterioration of the situation. The European social partners commend these workers for the work they have done.

The problems in the Fukushima nuclear power stations occurred 25 years after the accident in Chernobyl. They remind us of the long-lasting effects such incidents can have on health and safety of the workers concerned, on the general public and on the environment.

Recalling that the energy mix, including all low-carbon options, is a legal prerogative of the Member States, we stress the importance of having a European approach to managing the potential impacts those choices may have. Regardless of the choice made by Member States, the direct and indirect impacts of those generation options on workers, on the general public and on the environment should be properly managed. In this respect, the European social partners for the electricity industry welcome the renewed attention to the key issue of safety of nuclear power stations and nuclear facilities in Europe, the neighboring countries and even worldwide.

The social partners for the electricity sector strongly believe that the nuclear industry needs to meet the highest levels of safety possible and consider that a European approach in this area is needed. We support the nuclear stress tests proposed by the European Commission, Council of Ministers and European Council and confirmed by an agreement² between Member States, Commission and the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (ENSREG) on 25 May 2011 as they clearly contribute to this European approach.

¹ The reports of the International Atomic Energy Agency provide a detailed account of what has happened and which measures have been taken (<http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/tsunamiupdate01.html>)

² See http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/safety/doc/20110525_eu_stress_tests_specifications.pdf

The stress tests are thus a step in the right direction and open the process for discussions on European health, safety and security standards for the nuclear sector. Following the potential recommendations of the stress tests, appropriate measures need to be taken that ensure that power stations meet the safety levels required.

In particular, we would like to stress the following points:

Security and Safety

The nuclear industry needs to operate on a secure and safe basis. Given the potential impact of accidents, we strive towards the highest levels of safety for workers and the public. The nuclear stress tests should provide guidance on how to improve our performance in this area.

The nuclear safety directive puts the prime responsibility for safety, including health and safety, on the operator. We recommend that relations with subcontractors are evaluated to ensure the highest levels of health and safety and appropriate training to prevent that subcontractors pose a risk to the industry.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are absolute necessities. We welcome the publication of the results of the stress tests, which have been carried out by the operators. Trade unions and workplace representatives are to be informed about the stress test involving their workplace. This is important as the criteria of the stress tests also set out a number of workplace organisation and staffing issues regarding which the views of workers will be key. We recommend that social partners be one of the interlocutors of the nuclear (safety) regulatory bodies.

The outcome of the tests should be considered between social partners. This will allow the trade union side to be informed of possible measures that need to be taken and their consequences for workers and for the safety and security of the nuclear facility.

We recognise that the representatives of the trade unions and employers at nuclear power plants should be involved in the discussions on the potential social impact of the safety measures or investments to be taken following the stress tests outcomes.

Health and Safety

The accident in Fukushima Daiichi underlined the impact accidents can have on the workforce. Ensuring the highest levels of safety needs to dominate the operation of the industry. Trade union representatives should be involved in discussions about health and safety at all relevant levels of the companies (e.g. exploiting existing information and consultation bodies in the health and safety and training matters) and share information about those issues. Trade union representatives should have the possibility to be heard by the nuclear regulatory bodies on issues that have an impact on the health and safety of workers in the nuclear industry including waste disposal facilities.

Decommissioning

Once decommissioning is decided, appropriate measures need to be taken to ensure that the process of decommissioning is performed based on the highest safety levels. We note that decommissioning requires a long-term commitment to social dialogue, information and consultation, health and safety of staff. Dismantling a nuclear power station also requires measures to deal with the workers concerned directly or indirectly – as those working for subcontractors or suppliers –, the storage of waste, and the regional conversion that is needed especially where the nuclear power plant is a large employer.

Skills

In order to ensure the proper and safe functioning along the whole life-cycle of nuclear power plants, we need to tackle the issue of demographic change and ageing workforce in our sector. In the years to come, we could face skill shortages. As social partners we have addressed this most recently in our joint position on the European Energy Roadmap2050³ and in our contributions to the public consultations on the EU energy strategy 2020. We strongly believe that the issue should be taken into account in the forthcoming European Energy Roadmap 2050.

Conclusions

European social partners invite:

- The European Commission to present the first results of the nuclear stress tests to the Electricity Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee at its earliest convenience and indicate if and how it takes this opinion into account.
- The European Commission to prepare an overview together with European social partners on the impact that future developments in the nuclear industry may have on employment and future skill needs.
- The European Commission to present to the European social partners an overview of the impact of decommissioning on employment, skills and qualifications, and health and safety.
- The Commission to address properly the security and safety of workers and to evaluate the relations between operators and subcontractors in the upcoming nuclear safety directive to ensure the highest levels of health and safety and appropriate training to prevent subcontractors from posing a risk to the industry.

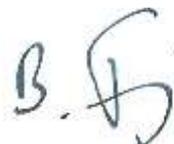
Agreed in Brussels, 6 December 2011.



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³ See <http://www.epsu.org/a/7501>