

DAILY NEWS to Members: 13/02/2007 by Tóth Gábor

PARLIAMENT HEARING PRAISES AND CONDEMNS 50 YEARS OF EURATOM

“New Treaty, no Treaty or status quo?” asked a public hearing organised by the European Parliament’s Energy (ITRE) Committee on 1 February, on the occasion of the upcoming 50th anniversary of the signing of the Euratom Treaty. Unsurprisingly, the experts gathered failed to agree on a unified answer on the future of the Treaty. Nevertheless, the hearing chaired by the Committee’s freshly appointed chair, German centre-right MEP Angelika Niebler, widely criticised the Treaty’s ‘democratic deficit’.

The hearing entitled *Assessing Euratom – 50 years of European Nuclear Policy* gathered a broad range of prominent speakers and panellists, including inter alia Astrid Klug, German State Secretary in the Environment Ministry’s Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety department; former MEP Rolf Linkohr, now director of the Brussels-based Centre for European Energy Strategy; Ernest Petrič, chair of the Board of Governors of the IAEA; Olli Heinonen, head of nuclear safeguards at the IAEA; Dominique Ristori, Deputy Director-General at the European Commission’s Energy Department; EU Energy Policy Campaigner Mark Johnston of Greenpeace; and Dörte Fouquet of Kuhbier lawyers. Sessions on experiences, challenges and future prospects were chaired by Hungarian Socialist MEP Edit Herczog, Austrian Conservative Paul Rübiger and UK Liberal Fiona Hall.

The debate was unusually well-balanced and definitely more reasonable than a previous debate five years ago*. All MEPs and most of the speakers criticised the Euratom Treaty’s ‘democratic deficit’ – the fact that the Treaty fails to engage the European Parliament in its decision-making. Some panellists also argued that the Treaty has been practically untouched during the 50 years of its existence, and has therefore become obsolete. Others used the same argument to prove that the Treaty *“has passed the test of time”*, that it successfully *“brings together states with and without nuclear weapons and industries”*, and that despite differences it *“defends the interests of all Member States”*.

Abolishing the Treaty, warned Mr Linkohr, carries the risk of re-nationalising nuclear energy and thus losing all opportunities for the Parliament to control it, and ending a successful regime and safeguard which, instead, should serve as a model for a new international system. Resonating on the latter thought, Mr Heinonen warned that the international non-proliferation regime currently *“is not in crisis but being tested”*. Ms Fouquet declared that the Euratom Treaty *“blocks any energy market development”*, and urged the Parliament to challenge the Treaty on this basis. She also referred to the provisions of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty as *“an obligation to democratise Euratom”*.

The *rapporteur* for the European Parliament’s own initiative report, Lithuanian Liberal-Democrat Eugenijus Maldeikis, stoically concluded at the end that *“more discussions are needed”* on the future of Euratom and of the nuclear industry in Europe.

*See DN 23/09/2002; see also DN 27/02/03 et al