

Ursula VON DER LEYEN
President
European Commission
1049-BRUXELLES
BELGIQUE

28 January 2021

Subject : letter from trade unions in the European nuclear sector

Dear Mrs von der Leyen, dear President of the European Commission

As the European community is strongly aiming to achieve a better tomorrow and a sustainable energy production, we need a dialogue that includes the different energy sectors and where decisions are based on the best available scientific advice, are economically sustainable and socially just. This will help us fight climate change and put us in the lead of developing a green society with the European objective of carbon neutrality by 2050. This-low carbon energy transition must be a major political priority for Europe.

As representative trade union organisations of European employees from different EU Member States in the energy sector, we would like to draw your attention to the key role that nuclear power generation must be able to play in enabling Europe to achieve its objective of carbon neutrality, a priority of the Green Deal that you presented in December 2019. Our industry also has the merit of contributing to Europe's energy autonomy at a time when the European Commission is promoting the concept of strategic autonomy in which energy plays a key role.

Currently nuclear power provides almost half of the low-carbon electricity production in the European Union and this enables the non-emission of half a billion tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year that would otherwise have been generated by high CO₂ heavy energy production. In this context, new generation nuclear reactors will soon be connected to European electricity grids, others are already planned and the extension of existing nuclear reactors have become a priority for many Member States, such jointly recommended by the IEA and IEAE. At the same time, a new generation of small modular reactors with easier construction and diverse technological solutions is emerging, proving that the European nuclear industry is constantly innovating and developing new technologies. This is all the more important for the European Union's carbon neutrality as the wind and solar power, for example, need this kind of stable electricity production to complement low emission energy production and to ensure stability of the European electricity system. If nuclear power were to be discriminated in this context, then complementary energy production to renewables would remain based on fossil fuel sources. The IPCC has repeatedly reiterated that nuclear power is an indispensable part of the solution to the climate challenge.

It must also be recognized that clean energy and renewable energy is not enough when we are at the same time experiencing a leap in digitalisation and transport that will require an increased amount of electrical energy.

In this perspective, and because we are convinced that nuclear energy is indispensable for achieving Europe's climate objectives, we wish to draw your attention to the imperative of including nuclear energy in the European taxonomy project. This taxonomy, once implemented, should provide investors with reliable information on activities and technologies that contribute to sustainability objectives. However, while the expert group has acknowledged the decarbonised nature of nuclear power generation, it has so far denied access to sustainable finance under a DNSH (Do Not Significantly Harm) criterion for nuclear waste management. There is, however, an international consensus (USA, Japan, Canada, Russia, China, Finland, Sweden, France) on the solution of geological disposal and already advanced projects which, after decades of scientific research. This exclusion of nuclear power from the European taxonomy would have a strong impact not only on the European nuclear industry but also on all European industries using nuclear electricity, especially electro-intensive ones. This exclusion, if it were to be decided, would not meet the important criterion of technological neutrality. We therefore urge the European Commission to follow up on the possibility opened by the TEG to allow a fair assessment of nuclear energy with regard to the DNSH criteria and also to take into consideration that any delay in including nuclear power in the taxonomy would send a negative signal to the financial community and would not allow equity in access to funding and financial tools for European recovery.

We are convinced that Europe's low-carbon energy transition cannot deprive itself of the advantage of nuclear power, at the very least for those Member States that wish to do so. The employees of the European nuclear industry that we represent are ready to play their part and contribute to the success of a just, efficient and fair low-carbon transition.

We therefore call on you and the entire European Commission to initiate a dialogue with the purpose of creating the conditions for nuclear energy to play its full potential in the central objective of the Green Deal, namely, to build a carbon-free Europe by 2050.

Respectfully yours,



Philippe Hendrickx, President
Belgian Energy Federation of Managers

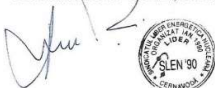


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