

## Nuclear industry ties call EU research body's impartiality into question

In March 2020, the Technical Expert Group on Sustainable Finance (TEG) established by the European Commission recommended excluding nuclear power from the green taxonomy, a European classification of low-carbon and transitional economic activities designed to guide investment. After intense lobbying by pro-nuclear stakeholders, the European Commission asked its Joint Research Centre (JRC) to assess the absence of significant environmental harm of nuclear power, paving the way to the sector's reinstatement on the list of activities deemed sustainable by the European Union.

However, the JRC's structural links with the Euratom Treaty, its relations with the nuclear industry and the views expressed publicly by JRC members on nuclear energy call into question the JRC's ability to conduct an objective assessment of the sustainability of nuclear energy. The European Commission should have entrusted this study to an impartial structure and included civil society.

**Greenpeace EU policy adviser Silvia Pastorelli said:** *"It's become more and more clear that the nuclear industry cannot stand on its feet without massive funding and that is why they're desperate for EU support, as nuclear power is too expensive and new projects are evaporating. In its report, the JRC is dangerously optimistic about the renovation of operating nuclear power plants. Independent scientists have already told the EU that the unsustainable environmental hazard of nuclear waste is enough reason to drop the technology. Rather than let a dying industry swallow up vital funding, the European Commission should back real climate action, excluding all fake green 'solutions' like nuclear, gas and biomass."*

### GENERAL CONTEXT

Across Europe, nuclear energy is in decline<sup>1</sup>. Nuclear electricity production has declined over the last 20 years<sup>2</sup>, and no large-scale programmes for the construction of new reactors have been launched in the European Union since the 1990s.

By 2019, nuclear power accounted for only 3.8% of investments in new electricity generation worldwide<sup>3</sup>. The financial sector considers nuclear projects as particularly risky and does not venture to finance them without state guarantees and financing to reduce that risk. The

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information on developments in the civil nuclear sector in the European Union, consult the [World Nuclear Status Report 2020](#), including "Nuclear Power vs. Renewable Energy Deployment - Status and trends in the European Union" and "Annex 1 - Overview by region and country - European Union".

<sup>2</sup> "Since the signature of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, [...] nuclear generated 98 TWh less power than two decades earlier", World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2020.

<sup>3</sup> REN21, [Renewables 2020 - Global Status Report](#), 2020 edition (calculation based on 2019 data from Bloomberg New Energy Finance).

inclusion of nuclear power in the European green taxonomy could redirect private investors towards this technology. In the long term, national governments could also use taxonomy to guide their investments. The European Union is already aiming to [make access to the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility conditional](#) on compliance with the principle of 'do no significant harm' developed in the taxonomy.

In the fight against climate change, this revival of nuclear power would be nonsensical. The deployment of nuclear power is out of step with the climate emergency: [Chapter 4 of the IPCC report](#) observes that it takes, on average, 10 to 19 years between the decision to build and the actual start-up of a nuclear power plant. A revival of nuclear power would monopolize essential funding for more effective climate measures, such as the energy-efficient renovation of buildings or the decarbonisation of transport.

To date, the lack of a long-term solution for the management of high-level nuclear waste does not allow nuclear energy to meet the taxonomy's criteria of do no significant harm<sup>4</sup>.

## TIMELINE

In March 2020, the TEG established by the European Commission issued its report on the list of green activities in which it would be preferable to invest in order to achieve a climate-neutral European Union by 2050. This report recommended excluding nuclear power from the list, in the absence of sufficient information on waste management, and suggested the issue be studied further.

Between March and July 2020, nuclear lobbies met with EU representatives twice as often as they have on average since 2018, according to the NGO [Reclaim Finance](#)<sup>5</sup>.

Their pressure seems to have paid off: in July 2020, the JRC was asked by the Commission to assess the absence of "significant harm" of nuclear power (or compliance with the "do no significant harm" principle). This decision was particularly welcomed by the nuclear lobby<sup>6</sup>.

The JRC evaluation report will be reviewed by two groups of experts: one on radiation protection and radioactive waste management provided for by the Euratom Treaty ([Article 31](#)) and "[SCHEER](#)", the Scientific Committee on Health, Environmental and Emerging Risks.

## THE JRC, A STRUCTURALLY PRO-NUCLEAR COMMISSION SERVICE

### - Creation -

The establishment of the JRC is provided for in [Article 8](#) of the Euratom Treaty (1957), the aim of which is to "*create the conditions necessary for the speedy establishment and growth of nuclear industries*" ([Article 1 of the Treaty](#)). The JRC is therefore institutionally linked to the Euratom Treaty and organisation, which seeks to preserve and promote the European nuclear industry.

---

<sup>4</sup> A study by Austria's environment ministry comes to similar conclusions. A summary can be read [here](#) and the complete study is available on request.

<sup>5</sup> According to Reclaim Finance, between January 2018 and 7 July 2020, 36 meetings between representatives of the European Union and nuclear lobbies took place: 1.2 meetings/month. Between March 2020 and 7 July 2020, however, 10 such meetings took place: 2.5 meetings/month.

<sup>6</sup> For Philippe Costes, Senior Advisor for the World Nuclear Association lobby, "[This level and range of this expertise is encouraging](#)". FORATOM, the main nuclear lobby in Brussels "[welcomes the European Commission's decision to appoint the JRC to assess nuclear under the sustainable finance taxonomy](#)".

Since its creation, the JRC has diversified into other areas. However, [nuclear research still represents 25% of its activity](#).

- *Continuing ties with Euratom and other pro-nuclear initiatives -*

One member of the [Strategy, Work Programme and Resources group of the JRC](#) is Said Abousahl, [Head of the Euratom Coordination Unit of the JRC](#), who is responsible for coordinating with the body established by the Euratom Treaty and the research programs on nuclear energy. A 2020 article written by Said Abousahl, Andrea Bucalossi, and two other JRC members, Victor Esteban Gran, and Manuel Martin Ramos [states](#) that: "*The JRC multi-annual work programme for nuclear activities fully reflects the objectives of the Euratom Research and Training Programme*".

Since the Fukushima disaster, the JRC has increasingly focused its communications on research on nuclear safety, security and waste management. But its initial mission – to support the development of nuclear power – has not been abandoned. The JRC continues to work on the development of fourth-generation reactors and small modular reactors (SMRs). One example is its partnership with the [GENIV International Forum](#) (GIF), an initiative of the United States Department of Energy "[created as a co-operative international endeavour seeking to develop the research necessary to test the feasibility and performance of fourth generation nuclear systems, and to make them available for industrial deployment by 2030](#)".

- *Funding -*

JRC nuclear research is mainly [funded](#) by the Euratom Research and Training Programme. For example, for the period of 2021 to 2025, it is agreed that [Euratom will provide 532 million euros to the JRC](#).

Other JRC funding that may initially seem to come from the EU budget has also historically been co-funded by the Euratom. This is for example the case of the Decommissioning and Waste Management Programme, which for over the last 10 years has been [co-funded by the Euratom Research and Training Programme](#), as the EU does not cover staff costs involved in such work.

The [Euratom Research and Training programme](#) is itself funded by Horizon 2020 – an EU framework programme for research and innovation, which often requires the participation of an industrial or academic partner. Research partnerships are subject to special agreements protected by confidentiality clauses, which hampers access to information about which JRC nuclear projects are co-financed by the nuclear industry.

## **AN ECOSYSTEM CLOSE TO THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY**

- *Links with pro-nuclear lobbies -*

**FORATOM:** the powerful nuclear lobby in Brussels is a JRC partner for training and recruitment structures ([ENEN](#), [EHRO-N](#) and [ELINDER](#)), technology platforms ([SNETP](#)) or for joint events ("[Supporting European expertise in nuclear decommissioning](#) " in 2018). The EU transparency register logged a meeting in 2018 between a FORATOM representative

and the former director of the JRC: ["It was agreed that cooperation was beneficial for both organisations and should continue in the future, preferably in a more structured way"](#)<sup>7</sup>.

**The Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform (SNETP):** [Two members of the JRC are members of the General Secretariat](#) of this platform, which aims to ["support and promote the safe, reliable and efficient operation of Generation II, III and IV civil nuclear systems"](#). Bernard Salha, R&D Director at EDF, heads the SNETP. The JRC is also involved in the research carried out by SNETP.

These JRC partner structures are linked to each other and to the nuclear industry in the same ecosystem.

- *Partnership research with the nuclear industry* -

Vincenzo Rondinella, Acting Head of Unit of the nuclear branch of the JRC, says in his [official biography](#): *"The research is performed in partnership with research and/or safety organisations, regulators and industry."*

For example, the JRC's research laboratories took part in the [Samofar programme](#) – "The way forward to the ultimate safe nuclear reactor" – in which [AREVA, the French Atomic Energy Commission \(CEA\) and EDF](#) also participated.

- *Worlds coming together at scientific events* -

JRC scientists regularly meet at the same round tables, conferences and other events attended by representatives of nuclear lobbies and/or industry professionals.

For example, at the [2019 FISA and EURADWASTE](#) conferences co-organised by the European Commission, Maria Betti, Director of the JRC Directorate for Nuclear Safety & Security of the JRC, co-chaired with a representative of FORATOM and EDF. A round table entitled ["Supporting European expertise in nuclear decommissioning"](#) was co-organised in 2018 by the JRC and the FORATOM lobby.

- *JRC members publicly display or relay pro-nuclear positions* -

**Maria Betti**, Director of the JRC Directorate for Nuclear Safety & Security of the JRC since 2015, regularly [retweets](#) pro-nuclear positions of governments, lobbies and nuclear industries (such as FORATOM, GIFEN, NEI, ENS and SFEN). As her Twitter account mainly consists of retweets, this may indicate a willingness to publish pro-nuclear positions.

**Rudy Konings**, Head of the Nuclear Fuel Safety Unit, alluded in an [article](#) to nuclear power having a vital role for the sustainable development of Europe and public opinion being biased by a wrong perception of nuclear risks.

**Concetta Fazio**, Head of the Nuclear Reactor Safety and Emergency Preparedness Unit, has [twitter](#) and [LinkedIn](#) accounts dedicated to pro-nuclear positions. Almost all of her messages are re-tweets from pro-nuclear lobbies, supporting the inclusion of nuclear power in the taxonomy, or its development. On the [website of the World Nuclear Association lobby](#) she has declared: *"There are some Member States that oppose nuclear and they bring forward renewables and, in this context, it is a bit more difficult than to try and integrate everything as you do in the United States."*, adding that the market will influence the debate,

---

<sup>7</sup> The quote can be found clicking on the 'meetings section, on the right of the transparency register for the organisation, scrolling down to the meeting of 27 February 2018:

<https://lobbyfacts.eu/representative/6f2a9aaa9668418a96b25c5086054d7f/european-atomic-forum>

*but studies into ways of integrating all low-carbon energy technologies in Europe “could be pursued more”.*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The pro-nuclear orientation of the JRC and its links to the nuclear industry disqualifies the JRC as a “neutral” advisory body. The European Commission must request a new, truly independent evaluation from a neutral body.
- Nuclear energy production should not be included in taxonomy because it does not meet the Do No Significant Harm principle, in particular the transition to a circular economy, as advised by the Technical Expert Group on Sustainable Finance (see Articles 3, 9 and 17 of the [European Regulation of 18 June 2020](#)).
- The direct and indirect funding, and links with the nuclear industry of the JRC's nuclear division and its members must be clearly stated, in the interest of transparency.
- Civil society has been sidelined from the process of assessing the environmental impact of nuclear power and its compliance with the “do no significant harm principle”. The decision to include nuclear power in the taxonomy or not is decisive for the future and the ecological and fair transition that European citizens want. The European Commission must be receptive to these demands, not limit access to industrial lobbies only, and include civil society in the consultation process.

### **Contacts:**

**Silvia Pastorelli – Greenpeace EU policy adviser:** +32 (0)496 12 20 94, [silvia.pastorelli@greenpeace.org](mailto:silvia.pastorelli@greenpeace.org)

**Greenpeace EU press desk:** +32 (0)2 274 1911, [pressdesk.eu@greenpeace.org](mailto:pressdesk.eu@greenpeace.org)

This media briefing is available on [www.greenpeace.eu](http://www.greenpeace.eu)

For breaking news and comment on EU affairs: [www.twitter.com/GreenpeaceEU](https://www.twitter.com/GreenpeaceEU)

Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace. We do not accept donations from governments, the EU, businesses or political parties. We have over three million supporters, and offices in more than 55 countries.

EU Transparency Register: 9832909575-41