

Nuclear energy: delivering solutions

ENA key-note speech by Alejo Vidal-Quadras

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Ladies and gentlemen

I am happy to be here today with you in order to address what, I believe, is key in our European energy future and that you have well expressed in the title of your 2 days conference: nuclear energy can deliver solutions. It can deliver solutions as we are all looking forward to providing Europe with a carbon free future.

The European Parliament is well aware of the challenges ahead of us and I truly believe that the role it has played over the past few years in order to include the nuclear energy in the debates has been remarkable. Indeed, I have been in the EP since 1999 and I have witnessed how the debates in our committee meetings as well as in plenary sessions about energy policy have become more pragmatic and less dogmatic. In our House, the nuclear energy has no longer the status of a “no go area”, of a taboo, but, on the contrary, it has become a central element in the energy debate. There is a real concern when it comes to analysing the climate change issue and the impact it already has in our daily lives, but also

with regards to the security of energy supply that Europe needs to fight for. This year we have been lucky; there hasn't been any disruptions in the gas supply like the ones we, and specially our eastern Member States, have suffered not so long ago. If anything, it has made us more aware that we cannot disregard a source of energy that has proven its benefits for many decades.

And coming back to the role that the EP has played, I would like to mention some of the key milestones achieved so far that can give you an idea of the real engagement shown by the EP towards the inclusion of nuclear energy in a low carbon economy: back in November 2007, we adopted the Reul Report, named after our current ITRE Committee Chairman, where a large majority agreed on the fact that nuclear energy is, and I quote, "indispensable if Europe's medium and long-term energy needs are to be met." That report constituted the first time that the parliament explicitly endorsed nuclear energy's role as "the largest low-carbon energy source in Europe" and a key component in Europe's future energy mix.

Since then, the EP has also succeeded in approving legislative proposals which, in the past, appeared to be very controversial, such as the nuclear safety directive, adopted in June 2009. In this same line, I hope that we will be soon able to deal with another very important piece of legislation, the radioactive waste management directive, which has a clear link with the public acceptance

of nuclear energy. Also since the beginning of the new parliamentary term almost a year ago, in July 2009, the EP has demonstrated its continued support for nuclear energy in a number of resolutions, most notably the *EU Strategy for the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change in November 2009*, and *Investing in Low Carbon Technologies* not later than last March.

However, it wouldn't be right to only mention the role that the EP has played, even if it has been crucial; I would also like to mention the energy that has been put by other EU institutions in providing nuclear with an equal footing with respect to other types of energy sources. The 2007 Spring Council's Conclusions suggested that broad discussion takes place among all relevant stakeholders on the opportunities and risks of nuclear energy. As you are all aware, the EC then created the ENEF process, a stakeholders' platform for discussion on nuclear energy issues.

From this stage, I would like to express my support to the initiative and would encourage all industry representatives to take an active part in the works being developed, and would also like to encourage going further into those issues that still need to be addressed within the platform.

ENEF is indeed crucial because one of its main goals is to draft a clear roadmap for the promotion of nuclear investments in the EU. And that reminds me of the speech addressed by French president Sarkozy during the International Conference on Access to Civil Nuclear Energy held in Paris on 8 March, where he said, and I quote: *“I do not understand why international financial institutions and development banks do not finance civil nuclear energy projects...”* And went even further when he proposed that “CO2 credits could be used to finance all forms of decarbonised energy under a new global architecture after 2013”.

President Sarkozy’s words are not surprising, of course. Since the beginning of the use of nuclear energy, France has shown the lead with the largest nuclear fleet in Europe, and it continues to be the case nowadays with the construction of a new type of reactor in Flamanville. But they are not alone. Finland, Slovakia and Bulgaria are going ahead with their plans, too. So, if I am not mistaken, 6 new reactors are being built in 4 of the 15 nuclear EU Member States. And this is not it. The UK has already identified the sites where they would like to implement their nuclear new build, Belgium has granted a 10 years extension to some of its reactors, Sweden has reversed their phase out policy, Italy will go nuclear after abandoning this type of energy more than two decades ago. And that is only to mention a few. So, this is maybe the proof that there is no myth but a real renaissance of the nuclear energy in Europe, even if

we are still far away from what other countries around the world have already achieved.

Of course, there I cannot but to mention China and its 23 reactors under construction as of today. And the US with, for the time being, 59 out of 104 reactors which have been granted a lifetime extension until 60 years. The US, with its President on top, has made it clear, very recently, that nuclear is in their country to stay. I would just like to quote Barack Obama in his State of the Union speech this year: “... *To create more ... clean energy jobs, we need more production, more efficiency, more incentives. That means building a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this country*”. And representatives of the Department of Energy in the US confirmed, in April, that, and I quote: “*Administration and Congress recognize nuclear energy must be part of the nation’s future energy portfolio* ».

These positions can help us understand, here in Europe, that there is a need for a serious engagement towards more nuclear. I believe therefore that the upcoming *Energy Action Plan 2011-2020* and the *Roadmap for a Low Carbon Energy System by 2050* from the EC will form an important milestone in working towards ensuring that the EU meets its ambitious 20-20-20 climate change proposals, and its long range vision for full decarbonisation of the energy system by 2050 where we should see a unequivocal reference to the role that

the nuclear needs to play. If we are successful, the EU will make significant inroads in resolving the twin challenges of securing new and diverse sources of future energy supply, and become a leader in the fast growing market for low-carbon technologies.

In order to ensure that by 2050 the EU's energy is largely decarbonised, strategic investment decisions need to be taken today. The EU must ensure that a policy framework exists which provides suitable incentives for investments to take place in those low-carbon energy technologies that are competitive and enhance European security of energy supply. As nuclear energy is an important part of the EU's energy mix providing two thirds of EU's low-carbon electricity, we will need to present a roadmap for nuclear energy development.

And this goes in line with the very recent first report issued earlier this month by the Reflection Group chaired by Mr. Felipe González, former Spanish socialist Prime Minister. The Reflection Group was established by the European Council, at its meeting in Brussels on 14 December 2007, and requested its members to write a report on the challenges that are likely to face the EU in 2030 and how we might address them. The issues tackled by the group are very diverse and go from analysing the need to strengthen economic governance in the EU, to undertake reforms to the functioning and supervision of EU's financial institutions or to tackle our demographic challenge. The Group also

has a very clear opinion on what has the EU to do with its energy policy. The report underlines that “the search for a more viable energy mix must also involve recourse to nuclear energy. Europe cannot afford to relinquish this important source of power”.

I completely agree with this. Like I said earlier, it is indeed my belief, and that of a majority of my colleagues in the European Parliament, that nuclear energy will have an important role to play in any future low-carbon energy system. However, there are still many issues that need to be addressed, such as the need to promote a stable long-term policy framework; the completion of the internal energy market; simplify and harmonise regulations; promote efficient action from financial institutions; support market-based mechanisms and financial incentives for low-carbon technologies; develop a European framework on nuclear waste management; increase investments in nuclear fission R&D and in European Industrial Initiatives; and co-ordinate and reinforce efforts in the area of education and training.

Dear friends, we have already gone far but we need to go even further. We from the European Parliament will continue to work to ensure that you have the right political support. That is not to say that the European nuclear industry should take our support for granted and “let its guard down”. Other low-carbon energy industries (RES, CCS etc) and environmental NGOs are gaining momentum

through sustained and highly proactive and visible campaigns to promote their positions vis-à-vis the EU institutions. The European nuclear industry should continue to share its experience and knowledge with all relevant private and public actors in the EU energy and environment policy arena with the aim to continue supporting the ongoing process to draft an EU nuclear roadmap and be, like our dear Loyola de Palacio said, "Nuclear energy is not the solution but there is no solution without nuclear energy ".

I wish you a very fruitful two days conference where most of those topics I have just addressed will also be tackled.

Thank you for your attention.