

Member Proposal

on Measures to Prevent Radioactive Pollution of the Baltic Sea

(Proposed by the Left-wing Socialist Green Group in the Nordic Council)

The Baltic Sea, our *mare nostrum*, is exposed to severe environmental impacts. So far, attention has mainly been paid to discharges of chemicals, one consequence of which is a shortage of oxygen, which constitutes a risk to life under the water surface. However, a serious risk of radioactive contamination is growing ever more threatening.

On 15 June 2005, the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) decided to prepare a strategic action plan for the Baltic Sea to counteract harmful impacts on the marine environment before the year 2007. It is the opinion of the Left-wing Socialist Green Group that this initiative should also encompass measures to combat continuing radioactive pollution of the Baltic Sea, which is threatening to grow more severe in the future.

Increases Long After Chernobyl

According to information provided by Danish experts in the field of radioactivity at the Risø-Laboratory, Swedish nuclear plants deliver most of the collective doses to the people living on the Baltic Rim. Since the decommissioning of Barsebäck, Oskarshamn leads the field. The countries that sustain the highest doses are Sweden, Finland, Poland, Denmark, Russia, and Latvia in that order. The Gulf of Bothnia and the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland are the areas most severely exposed.

Information provided by the HELCOM shows that the content of Caesium-137 in the Baltic Sea has increased during the 20th century - this despite the fact that contents were expected to decline continually during the decades following the Chernobyl disaster.

On 28 June 2005, the Swedish media reported that the storage facility for low and medium radioactive waste at Forsmark on the Swedish east coast leaked water that is ten times more radioactive than 'normally'. Despite warnings by the experts when the storage facility was designed, the competent authorities decided to refrain from factoring in corrosion of the facility setting in as early as has subsequently proven the case, and now tanks containing radioactive material have rusted through despite undertakings stating that they would last for hundreds of years. This does not bode well for the construction of the storage facility for highly active, spent nuclear fuel that is about to be built. For this we should be able to trust that it will last not for just hundreds of years, but for thousands of years into the future.

Nuclear Plants on the Baltic Rim

Today there is a large number of nuclear plants on the Baltic Rim, both plants in operation and plants that have been decommissioned. There are also plants being planned.

Sweden

It is true that Sweden has recently shut down the second and last reactor at Barsebäck, but sooner or later the radioactive material originating there will have to be handled and disposed of. The waste material from the Ringhals Reactors on the west coast is shipped via the Sound to the interim storage facility for highly radioactive waste at Oskarshamn (CLAB) and on to the final storage facility for low and medium active waste at Forsmark (SFR).

At Oskarshamn on the east coast, there are three nuclear reactors and CLAB. It remains unclear where the highly active Swedish waste will finally be stored. It may become necessary to effect more sea transports from CLAB.

At Forsmark outside Öregrund, three large-scale nuclear reactors and SFR-plants are located.

Outside Nyköping in Sörmland there is Studsvik with two research reactors which have now been decommissioned, but 4.6 tons of highly active waste is to be transported to Sellafield in the UK for reprocessing and will then, according to available information, be shipped back to Sweden. Studsvik also has a commercial undertaking processing radioactive metal waste and other radioactive residuals from various plants outside Sweden.

Denmark

Denmark does not use nuclear power, but has a research reactor at Risø which has been decommissioned following escapes of radioactivity.

Germany

In Germany the large-scale nuclear power plant at Greifswald on the Baltic Sea was closed in connection with the unification of East and West Germany. However, there seems to remain a considerable amount of radioactive waste - and probably even the highly active, spent fuel still remains in the plant.

Poland

Recently, the Polish government decided to build a nuclear power plant to be completed by 2020 (Gazeta Wyborcza 19/5-05). It is likely that this plant will be built on the Baltic Sea coast, the city of Darłowo has been mentioned as a suitable location.

Lithuania

In Lithuania, the second reactor of the Ignalina Plant is still operating. According to plans it is to be decommissioned by 2009. The highly active, spent fuel is stored in proximity to the reactor. The Ignalina reactor is of the same type as the Chernobyl Reactors the so-called RBMK.

Latvia

In Latvia, at Salaspils approximately 50 kilometres from Riga there is a research reactor dating back to Soviet times. Now that the reactor is being decommissioned, the problem of disposing of, for example, 10 tons of highly active, spent fuel remains unsolved.

Estonia

In Estonia on the Gulf of Finland, the Soviet naval base Paldiski used to be located. Swedish authorities have cooperated with the Estonian authorities and have made great efforts to secure the area as much as possible in terms of the risk of radioactive fallout. The Swedes have now left the project, but much work remains to be done. Paldiski is to be turned into a national storage facility for nuclear waste.

At Sillamäe, also on the Gulf of Finland, uranium has been mined and a plant for extracting raw uranium as well as importation to the uranium plant from, among other countries, Poland and Czechoslovakia was located there. Today an enormous mountain with layers of radioactive

waste is still there; an attempt has been made to wall them in to prevent discharge to the groundwater and to the Baltic Sea,

Russia

At Sosnovy Bor outside of St Petersburg, four RBMK reactors are still in operation. They are granted prolongations of their operating licenses whenever they report on measures to improve their safety, but no final date has been set for closing down any of these reactors. It remains unclear how waste is disposed of.

In addition to the civilian nuclear reactors at Sosnovy Bor, there are three military reactors and in connection with these a secret military plant for training personnel on board Russian nuclear submarines, NITI. According to available information this facility is now in the process of being expanded into an international training centre for nuclear submarine crews. According to the Baltic News (August 2005) the centre was established following President Putin's visit to India in December 2004 on which occasions issues in relation to military cooperation between India and Russia were discussed. In close proximity to the water and adjacent to the plant, a basin containing radioactive waste is located. This basin is spilling over as it is being exploited beyond its original capacity, and is said to contain radioactive material 'corresponding to several dozen Chernobyls'.

Located close to Sosnovy Bor a reprocessing plant for radioactive metal is to be found; it is called Ecomet-S, and is the largest of its kind in Europe with a total capacity of 5000 tons annually. The plant depends on receiving radioactive transports. The port of Ust-Luga was commissioned in 2001 and has a license to handle radioactive cargoes.

Also in the proximity of Viborg a port called Visotsk is under construction, and will be awarded a license to handle radioactive consignments.

The Russian enclave of Kaliningrad used to be a base for nuclear submarines. What the Russians have done with the nuclear waste originating from it is not clear, but it seems likely that the whole area is in dire need of being cleared of radioactivity.

The risk of future importation of spent nuclear fuel via the Baltic Sea to Russia has to be considered.

Finland

Finland has two old Soviet reactors still operating in Lovisa on the Gulf of Finland. Olkiluoto is located on the west coast of Finland and has two reactors in operation; it has been decided to build a third reactor, a so-called ERP-reactor, which will be the largest in the world; furthermore it is an untested model. A sixth Finnish reactor is already being discussed of the same model as the one planned. In connection with the Olkiluoto, plans are under way to build a deep storage facility for highly active nuclear waste of the same model as the one planned for Sweden; however, this country has not yet reached a final decision.

Uranium Mining

According to information provided by the Finnish media and by the Karelian environment protection movement, test bores with a view to uranium mining have been initiated near the lakes Ladoga and Onega. If uranium is mined, this will lead to discharges into the Gulf of Finland through a system of rivers and lakes. The Gulf of Finland is already one part of the Baltic Sea that is seriously affected by radioactivity. On the website of the company Agricola Resources it is stated that the company is involved in a uranium mining project and that it holds the exclusive right to extract uranium in a 153 square kilometers area at Hautajärvi and Kauhee in Finland. In Sweden big companies active in the field of iron ore mining have recently applied for licenses to prospect for uranium in a number of areas where, in the early 1980ies plans for uranium mining had been dropped. However, in the light of the expected rising uranium prices in the world market these finds that did not seem profitable before, have now become interesting again. Uranium extraction is very harmful to the environment and answering a question raised by the Left-wing

Socialist Green Group, the Swedish minister Ulrica Messig replied that such an activity is not topical at the moment. This, however, does not preclude future governments from taking a different decision if a situation arises in which uranium mining becomes profitable.

Transports, Emissions, and the Risks to the Seas

All of the above activities on the Baltic Rim presuppose transports of various types, normally by sea. The number of ports with licenses to handle radioactive consignments is high. This is a matter of both new nuclear fuel, medium active waste and spent, highly active fuel. It is also a matter of radioactive metals for processing at Ecomet-S and Studsvik and possibly, in future, uranium in various stages of processing.

In addition to the 'normal' discharges that are continuously accumulating, repeated exceptional discharges take place, as was recently the case at the SFR storage facility at Forsmark. Furthermore, there is an ever present risk of a major accident leading to radioactivity being discharged into the water, whether it be a matter of a radioactive consignment sinking on the deep sea and causes long-term discharges, or a reactor disaster with immediate consequences. Nor can we know what exactly is hidden beneath the surface, i.e. what radioactive military material might have been dumped at great depths during previous decades. Most recently, attention has been drawn to the risk of terrorist attacks against military plants and of the consequences to the surrounding environment.

Fish Impart Radioactivity to Human Beings

Among other things, researchers have been able to demonstrate increased quantities of Caesium-137 in fish caught in the Gulf of Bothnia and off Olkiluoto, Forsmark and Oskarshamn and even in fish caught north of Gotland. However, we know that Caesium and Strontium are present in varying quantities throughout the Gulf of Bothnia and in the Gulf of Finland. The main source of human exposure to radioactivity comes from eating fish. In the report, 'Modelling and Assessment of Doses' from the Risø Laboratory, Sven P. Nielsen states: 'The dominating exposure pathway is that of fish ingestion, which contributes about 2,400 manSv (94 %) while the other pathways yield the rest ...'.

Even if it were possible to eliminate the threat of death of the sea-floor and over-fishing to the point of extinction of the Baltic Sea, the problem of radioactivity in fish still remains. It is furthermore, as will be seen from the above, a growing problem.

Considering that 10,000 vessels from eight countries are active in the Baltic Sea and a multiple number of households depend on incomes from fisheries, in addition to being an environmental and health issue this is also a matter of relevance in terms of business and industrial policy.

Moratorium

In view of the many nuclear plants and the aggregated volumes of radioactive material stored on the Baltic Rim we consider it appropriate to introduce a moratorium on locating new reactors and radioactive waste on sites close to the coast. Any uranium mining activities in areas that hold waterways flowing into the Baltic Sea will undoubtedly have an additional detrimental impact on it.

Proposal

The Left-wing Socialist Green Group moves that

The Nordic Council recommends to the governments of the Nordic countries

that they act to introduce a moratorium on the location of new nuclear plants including uranium extraction activities adjacent to the Baltic Sea or lakes and streams that flow to the Baltic Sea

The Nordic Council recommends to the Danish, the Swedish, and the Finish governments

that they work to ensure that in its strategic planning for the Baltic Sea, the HELCOM includes radioactive pollution

The Left-wing Socialist Green Group moves that

the Nordic Council resolves

that the Nordic Council shall continue to work on issues relating to the state of the Baltic Sea in relation to radioactivity

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