



LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS APLINKOS MINISTERIJA
THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

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Compliance Committee
Convention on Access to Information, Public
Participation in Decision-making
and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters
(Aarhus Convention)
United Nations Economic Commission for
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Environment Division
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**REGARDING ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FROM THE COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE
(SUBMISSION ACCC/S/2015/02)**

On 18 July 2016, the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of Environment of Lithuania) received additional questions from the Compliance Committee of the Aarhus Convention regarding the submission ACCC/S/2015/02 concerning the Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant project (hereinafter referred to as the Ostrovets NPP) in Belarus.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Compliance Committee and the Secretariat for the work done in the relation to the submission ACCC/S/2015/02. Moreover, we are grateful for the possibility to provide our further insights concerning the subject matter. Please find our answers to the questions provided below.

Question 1 (a). Please provide evidence to substantiate each of the following allegations made by Lithuania with respect to the Ostrovets event organized on 17 August 2013: (a) the Lithuanian public was not duly informed.

We confirm our statement and maintain the position that the Lithuanian public was not duly informed about the event organised on 17 August 2013 in Ostrovets.

It should be noted that Belarus did not take into account the recommendation of the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention, as well as verbal and written requests from Lithuania to allocate reasonable time period necessary to evaluate the Environmental Impact Assessment (hereinafter referred to as EIA) documentation, received in June 2013 (volume over 1000 pages). Consequently, Lithuania repeatedly asked Belarus to abstain from any unilateral actions; however, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of Belarus hastily organized the event of 17 August 2013 in order to obtain a formal approval of the EIA Report for the Ostrovets NPP. To our knowledge, necessary information about the event organization and conditions of participation was not provided to the Lithuanian public concerned in advance. Related publications appeared in the Lithuanian press only after the event¹. It should be

¹ "Only Visaginas takes the Ostrovets bait" (publication dated 19 August 2013; <http://verslas.lrytas.lt/energetika/ant-astrovo-masalo-kimba-tik-visaginas.htm>), "Belarusian about the security of Ostrovets nuclear power plant: we cannot even build a national library in a proper way" (publication dated 18 August 2013;

noted that Belarus did not provide any information (explanations) about the event of 17 August 2013 in its written position of 8 October 2015 regarding the Lithuanian submission.

Questions 1 (b)-(d). Please provide evidence to substantiate each of the following allegations made by Lithuania with respect to the Ostrovets event organized on 17 August 2013:

(b) Lithuanian citizens wishing to get to the site of the event encountered difficulties;

(c) A group of people (mostly from Visaginas and formerly employed at another nuclear power plant) were specially gathered by Belarus for the purpose of going to Ostrovets as representatives of the Lithuanian public; and

(d) Without any prior warning, the departure for Ostrovets was one hour earlier than planned.

As it was stated above, due to unreasonable hurry and insufficient time for preparation Lithuanian public authorities could not support the organization of the event on 17 August 2013. Therefore, representatives of the public authorities of Lithuania could not participate in this event. Information regarding the 17 August 2013 event provided in the submission (included in Compliance Committee's questions 1 (b)-(d)) is based on the testimony of journalists and publications of Lithuania's mass media (listed in the footnote No. 1). These sources prove that deliberate obstacles for Lithuanian public were made in order to sort out those who wished to participate: restricted issuing of visas; limitation of information related to the proposed meeting, a group of people (mostly from Visaginas and formerly employed at the Ignalina NPP² who can potentially be employed at the Ostrovets NPP) deliberately gathered by Belarus for the purpose of going to Ostrovets as representatives of the Lithuanian public; organizing the departure for Ostrovets one hour earlier than planned.

In order to reveal the context, how the event of 17 August 2013 was organised, an extract from a complaint of 21 August 2013 submitted by a Lithuanian journalist to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania is highly illustrative:

"But in this case, I could not be taken on journalist bus and the route of my visit would be different. After this, one more interesting conversation started. Consulate officer started explaining me that despite he sympathizes me in my situation, he cannot issue me even ordinary visa, because he is not sure that while arriving at the event I would not ask people questions and make photographs. Meanwhile the female coordinator said not to worry and wait a little as the problem will be solved because they are very interested to take as many people to the event as possible.

Shortly after a pensioner arrived to the Consulate. I overheard that he is going to Belarus at the invitation of some organization and was issued a visa in 15 minutes while telling jokes to the consulate officers. After ten more minutes a woman arrived and said she was from the Journal "Verslo Žinios" and wants to travel to the same event in Astrav as private citizen. Same Consulate officer started giving her questions about her employer, name of the journal, her name, surname and so on. While processing the necessary papers, she was also informed that she does not have an accreditation and will be denied visa. The journalist started explaining that she will be visiting the event as private citizen, not on business trip, but was answered by the same phrases as I was, e.g. that the officer is not sure she will not ask people questions and make photographs, and so on. Right away he gave her a solution – she needs to sign in a commitment stating that she is not going to the event as a journalist, that she will not ask people questions or make photographs and that she is going to Belorussia on private basis.

Then I turned to the event coordinator and said that while on the trip I wish to do my job and I am not interested sitting and doing nothing. She instantly found a „solution“ – she said she will call me in a few days when my accreditation is ready and then I will travel to the Astrav nuclear plant site with a visa gratis any time convenient for me.

<http://www.delfi.lt/verslas/energetika/baltaruse-apie-astravo-atomines-sauguma-mes-net-nacionalines-bibliotekos-nesugebame-tinkamai-pastatyti.d?id=62104491>).

² Ignalina NPP started operation in the soviet times, in 1983, and was permanently shut down in 2009. Currently, the Ignalina NPP is in the process of decommissioning.

I never received any call or message from the embassy of Belorussia ever since.”

The full text of the complaint is attached to this letter. If needed, Lithuanian journalists are ready to confirm their statements to the Compliance Committee.

Question 2. Does Lithuania consider that Belarus was obliged to translate all documentation relating to the Ostrovets nuclear power plant? If not, please list which documents you consider Belarus should have translated into Lithuanian. Please also specify which documents you consider need not have been translated.

In our opinion, in order to ensure the equal opportunity of the national and foreign public concerned to participate in the EIA procedure, the public of the affected party and of the party of origin should get an equal possibility to get information about the object of the EIA and other EIA related issues. The Ostrovets NPP site is located 20 km to the Lithuanian border and 40 km to the Lithuanian capital Vilnius; that is closer than to any major Belarus city. Therefore, in case of an accident in the Ostrovets NPP Lithuanian population could be affected more severely than Belarus population. We are strongly confident that during the implementation of projects related to nuclear activities, the public concerned should at least get information in their national language about the project (detailed project description), impact to the population and environment, procedural and substantial issues of the EIA. It is important to stress that the documentation provided by Belarus to Lithuanian public in English did not include comprehensive information about the project and its possible impact to Lithuanian residents and environment. Moreover, the EIA Report, which was claimed to be translated into Lithuanian, was incomprehensible. It should be noted that the EIA documentation translated into Lithuanian should not differ from the original and other language versions. According to recommendation (f)³ adopted by the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention language requirements for public consultations should be met. However, translation to Lithuanian of the EIA documentation is of extremely poor quality (especially “Part 8.1 NPS Description”); some of the keywords have lost their original meaning (e.g. “plant” is referred as “flora” in its Lithuanian translation rather than “industrial plant”); references are made to Uzbekistan instead of Lithuania when analysing the transboundary impact of the NPP in Belarus; a lot of loosely translated and non-cohesive sentences and words make the text impossible to understand. The text made no sense and it was not suitable for presentation to the public. In the letter of 8 July 2013 Lithuania requested Belarus to provide a translation of the EIA Report that would be comprehensible and make sense; however, Belarus did not take the responsibility for the quality of the translation and did not provide a comprehensible translation into Lithuanian language. Lithuania repeated its request regarding the translation quality in numerous written and verbal communications with Belarus in the period from 2013 to 2016. The Ministry of Environment of Lithuania had no other choice, but to publish the EIA Report, provided by Belarus in incomprehensible Lithuanian language, along with an explanatory note that Lithuania assumed no liability for the translation and attached comments submitted by Lithuanian competent authorities.

Question 3. Please provide any other comments Lithuania would wish to make with respect to Belarus’ response dated 8 October 2015.

We are grateful for the possibility to comment upon the explanations provided by Belarus dated as of 8 October 2015. Despite the fact that we have not received an English translation of the explanations until today, we have analysed in detail the content of the response provided by Belarus. We are sorry to learn that the provided comments, in our opinion, are only of a general nature and Belarus did not comment upon each argument provided by Lithuania in its very comprehensive submission, and did not explain its position on such important issues as, for example, the event of 17 August 2013 in Ostrovets (events’ organizational issues, etc.).

Our further remarks on the explanations provided by Belarus are:

³ ECE/MP.EIA.IC/2013/2, para 74(f)

1. Regarding article 3, paragraph 9. We cannot agree that the right of public participation of the Lithuanian public was guaranteed by organizing event on 9 October 2009 in Ostrovets. Lithuanian public was not duly informed about the event and we do not have any evidence about the participation of any Lithuanians in this event. Belarus also did not provide any evidence supporting its statements about the participation of Lithuanians in the event of 9 October 2009. It should be stressed that according to the information provided in the findings and recommendations ACCC/C/2009/44 (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2011/6/Add.1), this event was initially announced as “local” and then as “national” a few days before it took place (para. 43(a)). Moreover, the event was organized on a workday and during the working hours (para. 43(b)). Taking this into consideration, the event of 9 October 2009 was dedicated to Belarus public only. Belarus also confirmed that the location of the event was chosen to allow for maximum involvement of the local population (para. 45(a)).

Furthermore, we cannot agree with the statement that Lithuania did not express its position on the quality of Lithuanian translation of the EIA Report. The issue of incomprehensible translation was pointed out in numerous bilateral written and verbal communications, starting from the official letter of the Ministry of Environment of Lithuania to Belarus dated as of 8 July 2013, followed by the letters of 10 September 2013, 29 May 2014 and 30 October 2015. The issue was also raised during the meeting of the Bilateral Lithuanian-Belarus Intergovernmental Commission on 9-10 November 2015 in Minsk⁴, also during the meeting of the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention on 15 March 2016 in Geneva⁵, as well as during the bilateral Lithuanian-Belarus delegations’ meeting on 21-22 June 2016 in Vilnius (see attachment No 2 – the Interim Report of the meeting).

2. Regarding article 6, paragraph 2. We retain our position that according to the principle ‘polluter pays’ Belarus, as the party of origin, had an obligation to provide interpretation into the national language of the public concerned during the event of 2 March 2010 in Vilnius, but failed to do so. Our position is also justified by the provisions of the Draft Bilateral Agreement on the Implementation of Espoo Convention between Belarus and Lithuania (currently, the draft agreement is in preparation) foreseeing that interpretation during the public hearing shall be provided by the party of origin; the party of origin shall bear the costs and be responsible for the quality of interpretation during the public hearings.

3. Regarding article 6, paragraph 3. We cannot support Belarus’ position that the updated EIA Report, provided in the meeting of 18 June 2010, did not contain any new substantial information as materials were four times the size (approximately 1000 pages) compared to the previous EIA Report of 2009 (which was the last one that Lithuanian authorities received before the meeting of 18 June 2010). We consider the EIA Report substantially amended, as it contained significant and numerous changes. Besides, we would like to note that the new version of the EIA Report was presented during the meeting on 18 June 2010 unexpectedly, without any official notice in advance.

4. Regarding article 6, paragraph 8. We retain our position that Belarus failed to ensure that in the decision-making on siting and construction of the NPP due account would be taken of the outcome of the public participation (most importantly, the EIA Report and the conclusions of the State environmental expertiza). The decisions on siting and construction of the NPP in Ostrovets site preceded the preparation of the final EIA Report and public hearings for Lithuanian public. The final decision on site selection was adopted on 15 September 2011 by the Decree No. 418 of the President of the Republic of Belarus⁶; however, public hearings for Lithuanian public have not been

⁴ Report of the meeting, paragraph 4.4 *Regarding the implementation of the Belarus Nuclear Power Plant project and implementation of the recommendations of the 6 Meeting of Parties of the Espoo Convention*: “<...> Lithuanian side stated that the Lithuanian translation of the EIA Report was made using the automated translation software and was of extremely bad quality <...>”.

⁵ The meeting of 15 March 2016 was dedicated to the Lithuanian submission of 7 June 2011 regarding the Belarus NPP project. Lithuanian and Belarus delegations participated in the meeting.

⁶ The Presidential Decree of 15 September 2011 was adopted right after the Lithuanian submission of 7 June 2011 to the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention regarding the transboundary EIA procedures’ infringements in the Belarus NPP project.

arranged up until now.

Question 4 (a). *The Committee notes the helpful summary on page 16 of Lithuania's submission dated 25 March 2015 in which Lithuania sets out its view of the key differences between communication ACCC/C/2009/44 and submission ACCC/S/2015/2. The Committee now invites each Party to provide its view on which, if any, of the legal arguments raised by Lithuania in ACCC/S/2015/2 have already been considered, or are presently being considered, by the Committee in: (a) The findings on communication ACCC/C/2009/44 (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2011/6/Add.1).*

Legal arguments raised in the submission ACCC/S/2015/02 and considered by the Compliance Committee in the findings and recommendations ACCC/C/2009/44 (ECE/MP.PP/C.1/2011/6/Add.1):

1. Public faced extremely short time-frames to prepare and participate in the public participation procedure (para. 23(d)).
2. Public was not informed about the State environmental expertiza conclusions and could not comment upon them (para. 23(f)).
3. Public had no possibility to comment upon the EIA Report (para. 23(g)).
4. Public consultations began at a late stage, when most options were closed, and Belarus failed to comply with article 6, paragraph 4: the public was not given any possibility to discuss the non-NPP alternative, the choice of technology and the choice of location (para. 39), as the decisions were already taken unilaterally in advance (also see answer to Question 3, para 4).
5. Party concerned failed to fulfil its obligation to duly inform the public about the possibility to examine the EIA Report.

Question 4 (b). *The Committee notes the helpful summary on page 16 of Lithuania's submission dated 25 March 2015 in which Lithuania sets out its view of the key differences between communication ACCC/C/2009/44 and submission ACCC/S/2015/2. The Committee now invites each Party to provide its view on which, if any, of the legal arguments raised by Lithuania in ACCC/S/2015/2 have already been considered, or are presently being considered, by the Committee in: (b) The review of the implementation of decision V/9c of the Meeting of the Parties on compliance by Belarus.*

Legal arguments raised in the submission ACCC/S/2015/02 and considered by the Compliance Committee in the review of the implementation of decision V/9c on compliance by Belarus of the Meeting of the Parties:

1. Public was not duly informed about the full version of the EIA Report (para. 1(ii)).
2. Public was precluded from having any input on the decision on whether the NPP installation should be at the selected site, first of all, since the decision regarding the siting of the NPP had already been taken (para. 1(iii)).
3. Party of origin failed to fulfil its obligation to duly inform the public about the possibility of examining the EIA Report (para. 1(iv)).

New legal arguments, raised by Lithuania in the submission ACCC/S/2015/02

The right of the Lithuanian public (public concerned) to access information about the Ostrovets NPP project and the right to participate in the decision making process was infringed:

1. Belarus did not ensure interpretation into Lithuanian during the event of 2 March 2010 in Vilnius. Moreover, Belarus also failed to provide explanations to the Lithuanian public in Russian. The right of Lithuanian public concerned to take part in the public hearing (in the sense of substance) was constrained.
2. Lithuanian public was not provided with sufficient information about the Ostrovets NPP project and the EIA procedures in Lithuanian (see also answer to Question 2).
3. Lithuanian public was not duly informed about the hastily organized event of 17 August

2013 in Ostrovets. In addition to this, public concerned from Lithuania could not attend the event (see also answer to Question 1 (a) and Questions 1 (b)-(d)).

4. Belarus failed to provide to Lithuania the EIA Report that would contain information about the Ostrovets NPP project, necessary in the transboundary EIA process and requested by the Lithuanian public concerned. Belarus still has not provided the information up to this day.

5. Belarus failed to provide the EIA Report in the national language (Lithuanian) to the Lithuanian public in order to allow for public participation. Moreover, the EIA Report in English did not include essential information about the NPP, requested by the Lithuanian authorities. Due to these reasons, we think that rights of the Lithuanian public to participate in the EIA procedure and to comment were seriously infringed.

6. Not only public participation was restrained by various means in the case of the Ostrovets NPP, but also Belarus did not take due account of the outcome of the public participation in the decision-making (see also answers to Questions 3 and 4).

Question 5. The Committee notes that, at its thirty-fifth session (Geneva, 15-17 March 2016), the Implementation Committee of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) invited Belarus and Lithuania to carry out bilateral expert level consultations on a number of issues raised during the follow-up to decision VI/2 of the Meeting of the Parties of the Espoo Convention and to jointly report to the Committee on the results of those consultations by 29 July 2016 for consideration by the Implementation Committee at its next session (see ECE/MP.EIA/IC/2016/2, para. 24).

The Committee invites each Party to give its view on whether any developments in connection with the follow-up of decision VI/2 since Lithuania made its submission in ACCC/S/2015/2 on 25 March 2015, that the Party considers would be important for the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee to take into account in its deliberations on ACCC/S/2015/2.

On 21-22 June 2016, in Vilnius, Lithuanian experts' delegation had a meeting with Belarus experts on the issues of the Ostrovets NPP. The draft agenda that was elaborated considering the discussions at the meeting of 15 March 2016 of the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention contained the following list of topics:

- 1) Presentation on the current stage of the Ostrovets NPP project;
- 2) Application of transboundary EIA procedures and decision making;
- 3) Assessment of locational alternatives for the NPP construction (including no-action alternative);
- 4) Evaluation of the site and the NPP site selection criteria including tectonic, geological and geophysical and seismological aspects;
- 5) Seismic safety assessment;
- 6) Assessment of seismicity and seismic hazards of the Ostrovets and alternative sites;
- 7) IAEA's Site and External Events Design (SEED) mission and stress-tests for the Ostrovets NPP;
- 8) Assessment of impacts in case of accidents. Preparedness and response to a nuclear or radiological emergency;
- 9) Potential contamination of the river Neris (Vilija) and groundwater resources in the capital Vilnius in case of major accidents in the Ostrovets NPP;
- 10) Design of the NPP;
- 11) Nuclear safety and radiation protection regulatory regime including development of the relevant legislation in Belarus;
- 12) Measures taken to control and ensure the highest quality of construction works and during operation of the NPP; Incidents;
- 13) Spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste management policy and plans;
- 14) Organization of environmental monitoring.

Due to the time constrains, not all of the agenda items were opened in this meeting. The detailed discussion was held on agenda items 2-8 based on Lithuanian experts' questions and their

argumentation, as well as presentations of Belarus experts. Discussion on item 9 was started, but interrupted. Subsequent agenda items were not discussed. The next meeting is planned in September 2016 in Belarus.

In relation to the Aarhus Convention the discussion of the agenda item 2 *Application of transboundary environmental impact assessment procedures and decision making* was the most relevant. Lithuania emphasized that the Ostrovets site was chosen and the construction works were commenced before the start of the transboundary EIA procedures, although the Espoo Convention requires to evaluate alternative sites in the process of transboundary EIA and to choose the location as a result of it. This constitutes a serious violation of the Espoo Convention. Moreover, during the meeting of 21-22 June 2016 Belarus experts directly admitted that the Ostrovets site was the only one considered in the process of the transboundary EIA.

Lithuania also recalled the decision of non-compliance, adopted in June 2014, by the Meeting of Parties of the Espoo Convention, regarding the transboundary EIA of the Ostrovets NPP, and urged Belarus to implement the given recommendations without any further delay. Besides, Lithuania encouraged Belarus to accept the proposal of the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention to establish an international experts' body modelled after the Inquiry Commission set in Appendix IV of the Espoo Convention for an in-depth analysis of the Ostrovets NPP case under the Espoo Convention⁷. However, Belarus strongly opposed it, claiming that the mentioned commission is a new unprecedented instrument and it requires additional financial resources. During the meeting of 21-22 June 2016, Lithuania insisted that Belarus should submit the revised EIA Report, which would include comprehensive information on the Ostrovets NPP, including the sites' research, evaluation and selection issues, and would address the identified inconsistencies and shortcomings, or, alternatively, add the mentioned information in an Annex to the EIA Report for further analysis by Lithuanian experts and for public consultations. However, Belarus refused to do so.

It is important to highlight that the meeting of Lithuanian and Belarus experts revealed fundamentally different approaches towards methodology and implementation of the international standards, including the principles of openness, transparency and good faith.

Presentations and verbal explanations provided by Belarus experts also revealed that:

- a) New information, which had never been submitted to Lithuania, was presented at the meeting;
- b) New information contradicted the data provided in the EIA Report and previous communication of Belarus;
- c) New information, in most cases, was of technical and scientific nature and needed careful analysis by Lithuanian authorities and scientific institutions.

Update on the public information and public reaction regarding the construction of the Ostrovets nuclear power plant

There have already been at least three incidents at the construction site of the Ostrovets NPP during the last four months (on April 8, June 4 and July 10, 2016). In all the cases the Lithuanian Government and public were not informed about them by the Belarussian authorities, but only learned about them from unofficial sources, namely, the independent Belarus media, a few weeks after an incident, as a rule. Belarus used to deny incidents at first, and when it was obvious that they had happened, used to downgrade their significance. This clearly indicates that Belarus Government lacks openness and transparency in communication and does not give possibilities to the public to access information on the construction process.

The first incident occurred on 8 April 2016, when load bearing structures were damaged while bridging the span between the two would-be nuclear reactors. On 5 May 2016, as soon as the information about the incident became available to Lithuanian authorities, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania summoned the Ambassador of Belarus to Lithuania Mr Korol and handed him a diplomatic note, requesting to promptly provide information about this accident as well as about

⁷ Letter of the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention, dated 16 December 2015, also the Committee's proposal had been repeated at the 35th session of the Implementation Committee that took place on 15 March 2016.

other accidents, which could have happened since the beginning of the construction works in Ostrovets. The following day Belarus admitted that on 8 April 2016 there was an incident at the construction site of the Ostrovets NPP and called it as *a defect*.

The press also reported an alleged incident on 4 June 2016. On 8 June 2016 Lithuania handed another note to the Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Belarus to Lithuania Ms Tatarinovich. However, Belarus denied this incident.

The latest incident took place on 10 July 2016, when 330-ton reactor vessel was dropped from 2 to 4 meters' height. Belarus did not disclose any information about the incident until it appeared in the independent media on July 25. Even then, Belarus officials denied the fact of an incident, calling it an "unusual situation" and main constructor downgraded the scale of incident. First Deputy General Director of the Rosatom corporation Alyaksandr Lakshyn commented on the incident: *"All this time the slant was gradually increasing and eventually led to the fact that the reactor vessel slipped on the rafters and hung diagonally touching the ground. The whole event was being filmed on video and the load on the crane hook was being checked. Even when it touched the ground the main production of weight of the reactor case – more than two thirds – was suspended by the crane. Thus using words such as "hit the ground" or "dropped" is wrong, it misleads people and distorts the essence of what happened, as the speed of the case movement did not exceed the walking speed"*⁸.

On 28 July, the Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of Belarus to Lithuania Ms Tatarinovich was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, where she was handed a diplomatic note and requested to immediately provide detailed information related to the incident of July 10. However, no official answer has been received until now. Lithuania considers that the latter incident, when the nuclear reactor vessel was possibly damaged, is very dangerous, as it could lead to the deterioration of its characteristics and significantly increase the radiation hazard of the NPP. However, it is important to note that on 11 August the Minister of Energy of Belarus Mr Potupchik admitted that the reactor pressure vessel must be replaced and requested Russian State Nuclear Energy Corporation "Rosatom" to do so.

The facts mentioned above demonstrate the systematic behaviour of Belarussian authorities: firstly, to always deny any incident, afterwards, when the information is leaked in the independent media, to admit the fact of the incident, but to downgrade the consequences. In case of the three incidents at the construction site of the Ostrovets NPP, Belarus did not inform the national and the international public and only due to active Lithuanian stance on the issue Belarus was forced to disclose the information.

We would also like to draw your attention to the Lithuanian public attitudes towards the Ostrovets NPP. In the period from 9 May 2016 to 9 July 2016, nearly 65,000 Lithuanian citizens expressed their opposition to the Ostrovets NPP by signing a petition to the Parliament (Seimas) of the Republic of Lithuania. The petition stressed that the Ostrovets NPP poses a threat to Vilnius and to the whole country due to the NPP's geographical location selected without consultations with Lithuania, and due to the technological parameters; moreover, the project is being developed in non-compliance with international conventions. As the petition was supported by more than 50,000 citizens, Lithuanian Parliament is obliged to consider a law on special protection measures against the Ostrovets NPP.

The biggest negative impact on public acceptance towards nuclear energy in Lithuania was induced by Belarus decision to construct the Ostrovets NPP only 40 km away from Lithuanian capital Vilnius that houses more than half a million residents and almost all governmental institutions. Lithuanian authorities estimate that transboundary effects from the Ostrovets NPP can affect 1/3 of Lithuanian population (within the range of 100 km from Ostrovets NPP) and considering that the waters of transboundary river Neris (Vilija) will be used for cooling purposes for the Ostrovets NPP, drinking water and Nemunas River basin, which covers 72 percent of Lithuanian territory, may be contaminated with radionuclides.

⁸ "Rosatom: Belarussian NPP reactor housing not damaged, but we can replace it" (publication dated 2 August 2016 <http://belsat.eu/en/news/rosatom-korpus-reaktaru-belaes-ne-pashkodzhany-ale-my-gatovyaya-yago-zamyanyits/>)

ENCLOSURES:

1. Complaint of the NGO "Demokratijos plėtros fondas", dated 21 August 2013, No 2-13774 in the original language and translation into English, 4 pages.
2. Letter of the Ministry of Environment of Lithuania to the Implementation Committee of the Espoo Convention, dated 27 July 2016, including the Interim Report of the Lithuanian-Belarus experts' meeting of 21-22 June 2016 on to the issues of the Ostrovets NPP, 22 pages.

Chancellor of the Ministry of Environment

Robertas Klovas