Espoo, Austria and Nuclear Power Plants

Since Austria has enacted a constitutional ban of nuclear energy for electricity as well as heat production, the Austrian experience with EIAs related to NPPs or other nuclear installations is primarily that of a potentially affected Party. It should be noted, however, that an EIA was required for the decommissioning of the ASTRA research reactor in Seibersdorf (near Vienna).

Although efforts are ongoing to continuously improve nuclear safety, severe accidents with large releases of radionuclides cannot be excluded, not even for the most advanced “Gen III” designs currently under construction. Above that, experience shows that also other accident situations might lead to substantial releases of radionuclides. Depending on meteorological as well as hydrographical circumstances emergency interventions could be required or damage could occur even very far away from the nuclear release. So the risk may be low, but possible damage in case of severe accidents with large releases may be very high.

Consequently, Austria deems itself to be an affected Party in any case, if transboundary impacts requiring any countermeasures (e.g. interventions like sheltering, food or water restrictions, stable iodine administration, evacuation, etc.) to protect the Austrian population or to reduce adverse transboundary impacts cannot be completely excluded. Of course, Austria is well aware of the fact that the occurrence of such a situation is depending on a number of factors, such as the meteorological situation (wind direction and speed, precipitation, etc.), the size and height of the source terms (release of radionuclides), distance to the release, principal wind directions, etc.. But even if the probability for such a situation might be very low, Austria has to be prepared for this.

As to the content of the Environmental Report, Austria expects inter alia information about possible severe accident sequences and their probability as well as other possibilities for a release of radionuclides together with information regarding measures to reduce size and probability of such releases, be it changes in the design to prevent such events or severe accident management. This information should cover all types of internal as well as external initiating events, including terrorist attacks (e.g. aircraft crashes).

Austria regularly asks the country of origin to take part in a public hearing organized in Austria for its own population; in particular, but not only in case of projects in neighbouring countries. NPP projects very often meet with broad interest of the Austrian population, sometimes resulting thousands of written objections (e.g. NPP Mochovce 3+4 completion: over 200,000).

During the consultations – which might require more than one meeting – Austria is striving for a maximum of information regarding safety and security measures and their efficiency. Respecting national sovereignty and international law regarding national energy policies, including nuclear policies, Austria demands convincing
evidence that state-of-the-art levels of safety and security are met, including effective regulation, supervision and monitoring; provided that there are no reasons prompting a rejection of the project as such. This process may result in an Austrian request for modifications of the project and/or effective monitoring systems and continued information exchange.

**Problems** we face in the EIA procedures:

- A lack of information about the EIA procedure in the Party of origin (does not apply to neighbouring countries) which results in difficulties for Austria fulfilling its duties as an affected Party to give equivalent opportunities to its own public;

- A lack of information about possible severe accident sequences and their probability as well as other possibilities for a release of radionuclides together with information regarding measures to reduce size and probability of such releases in the Environmental Impact Documentation (no information at all or not in sufficient detail);

- Since in some EIA systems the EIA procedure is carried out so early, that no technical specifications, in some cases not even the location of a future NPP is known, we have to require participation in the whole licensing procedure in order to achieve the goals of the EIA, namely the assessment of possible damages and threats to the Austrian population and the environment;

- Sometimes no translation or translations in bad quality (has generally improved);

- The final decisions do not always take due account of the outcomes of the EIA;

- Sometimes it is difficult to get the final decisions, EIA authorities and points of contact often forget to send the subsequent development consent decisions in cases where the EIA is followed by separate subsequent development consent procedures.