



Radioactive Waste Management - A Civil Society Perspective

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Conclusions

The European Commission (RTD) and the EESC (TEN Section) launched a collaboration including the European Joint Programme on Radioactive Waste Management (EURAD) aiming at broadening the involvement of civil society representatives in the management of radioactive waste, especially in view of the launching of EURAD-2 in October 2024. The first deliverable has been the 17 October 2024 **joint EC-EESC conference focusing on civil society views on radioactive waste management**. This joint event preceded the official launch of EURAD-2 set for 23 October.

The conference brought together representatives from EU institutions, civil society, national and local actors to explore the diverse roles of scientific research and technological innovation in safely managing radioactive waste. It will underline the importance of broad participation, involvement, and interaction of civil society in public decision-making regarding radioactive waste management. It is important to better understand and effectively address societal expectations, needs, and concerns regarding radioactive waste management, particularly at local, regional, and national levels, drawing from past and ongoing experiences in the field.

All EU Member States have generated and continue to generate radioactive waste from power generation, as well as from industrial, agricultural, medical, and research activities, and through the decommissioning of nuclear facilities. The safe and responsible management of spent fuel and radioactive waste is a crucial prerequisite for any nuclear activity and is a responsibility of each Member State.

With this in mind, the conference offered to participants a comprehensive overview on the radioactive waste management: from the current **state of play in terms of regulatory framework**, continuing with the diversity of **perspectives of the civil society** from all 27 Member States expressed from the podium and the audience, followed by testimonies on **best practices** in three Member States and finishing with an **agreement for a strong CESE and EURAD collaboration**.

Conference outline

The Conference was open by Baiba Miltoviča, President of the EESC Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and Information Society and Rosalinde Van Der Vlies, Director, European Commission, DG RTD Clean Planet. Both speeches concentrated on the importance of the topic, its relevance for the citizens in general and a joint call for a reinforced involvement of civil society in all aspects related to radioactive waste management (RWM). The conference was moderated by Mr. Seif Ben Hadj Hassine, policy officer, European Commission (DG RTD) and by Mrs Corina Murafa, EESC Member.

The conference started with a **state of play** on RWM, a comprehensive *tour de table* presented by the European Commission (EC) and EURAD. The EC (DG ENER) focused on the transposition and implementation of the Directive 2011/70/Euratom¹ in the Member States based on the findings of the 3rd Progress report published in May 2024. Conclusions were overall on a positive note but with a clear message that still the Directive's objectives for all categories of radioactive waste have not been fully achieved yet. This was followed by a thorough overview of EURAD's activities as a step change in European collaboration on RWM with key achievements in scientific excellence, building trust and mutual understanding and knowledge transfer.

The session on **the point of view of civil society** started with a presentation of the main recommendations of the EESC own-initiative opinion on "Radioactive waste management: a civil society perspective"². The panel continued with interesting interventions by representatives of Nuclear Transparency Watch (NTW), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the Group of European Municipalities with Nuclear Facilities (GMF). These interventions highlighted the diversity of the views coming from civil society representatives. The ultimate challenge is to build, manage and monitor disposal facilities for radioactive waste that guarantee the highest level of protection of the environment and public health. Therefore, an early engagement enables meaningful contributions from civil society stakeholders.

The three very interesting case studies presented **best practices** and diverse experiences from a national perspective. The success story of the one-of-the-kind deep geological repository on Olkiluoto (Finland) that the CESE Delegation had the chance to visit, as well as the overviews from Belgium and Slovakia, all highlighted the need for transparency and to build trust and mutual understanding as key prerequisites for safe and responsible RWM.

The last session of the Conference stressed that **the way forward** for civil society engagement in radioactive waste management (RWM) is to continue and strengthen the progress made in the framework of EURAD activities. This can be done by expanding the current EURAD network in view of reaching out to a broader group of Civil Society Organisations (CSO), further enhancing their role in radioactive waste management processes.

Baiba Miltoviča, President of the EESC TEN Section, presented the **concluding remarks** and highlighted that interventions from the civil society, European institutions, national administrations and industry itself, all concur in supporting the idea of the power of collective effort. CESE will act in this direction

¹ Council Directive 2011/70/Euratom of 19 July 2011 establishing a Community framework for the responsible and safe management of spent fuel and radioactive waste

² "Radioactive waste management: a civil society perspective" (TEN/842-EESC-2024)

through a strong collaboration with EURAD that will jointly enhance public engagement and transparency in RWM.

Key recommendations

1. Given that every Member State faces essentially the same challenge, **cooperation is essential. Sharing best practices, collaborating on solutions, and establishing a strong network** within the EU to collectively address RWM is the most effective path forward.
2. Science and technical expertise exist to serve the well-being of citizens, therefore decisions on RWM shall be based on **enduring partnerships with civil society groups**.
3. Nevertheless, decisions made for future generations, including the technical solutions pursued and the priorities set, **should not be determined solely by scientists** or based purely on scientific considerations.
4. Involving a broad range of **European civil society representatives in scientific and technical partnerships** on radioactive waste management ensures that **diverse perspectives are considered**, promoting **more balanced decision-making**.
5. An increased civil society involvement in RWM would foster **transparency and public trust** in the process.
6. **Civil society representatives** should be **involved early in the research process**, allowing them access to information at the initial stages of the knowledge chain.
7. **Integrating civil society (CS) concerns and views** into research is based on the Aarhus Convention's pillars of access to information and participation.
8. The transposition and implementation of the Directive 2011/70/Euratom³ in the Member States **have not fully achieved yet the Directive's objectives** for all categories of radioactive waste. A **more thorough evaluation** of the Directive's effectiveness in ensuring **responsible** management of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste **is required**.
9. Member States should **adopt circular economy strategies** to minimize radioactive waste generation. By prioritizing **waste reduction, reuse, and recycling** wherever possible, Member States can significantly **reduce the environmental impact** and **improve the sustainability** of radioactive material management.
10. Municipalities shall be an **active part, an asset** in the whole process of **RWM decision making**, from start to final closure.
11. **RWM decision making** has to be based on the principles of safety and security; open and transparent cooperation; trust and local acceptance.
12. The **ultimate challenge** is to build, manage and monitor disposal repositories for radioactive waste that guarantee the highest level of protection of the environment and public health.
13. A future, **strong collaboration between EESC and EURAD** will combine **scientific expertise with societal engagement** and contribute to **safe, sustainable, and socially acceptable solutions for RWM**.
14. The creation of a **third wing for civil society involvement during EURAD-2** (e.g. a larger group of CS representatives including EESC members from the three groups) will ensure an inclusive and representative decision-making process on RWM.

³ Idem1.