Nuclear phase-out in Bulgaria without further delay

All European Greens strongly support the transition from nuclear to renewable energy. Nevertheless, there are still countries where governments are postponing the nuclear phase-out, ignoring the rights of their citizens to a healthy life in a safe environment, which is also significantly affected by the operation of outdated nuclear power plants. As mentioned in the resolution adopted at the EGP Council in Antwerp (18-20 May 2018) referring to "nuclear phase-out in Belgium without delay", people in many European countries are very worried about extending the lifespan of nuclear plants because of the many major incidents which have previously occurred in such facilities, and the risks involved in all links of the nuclear chain from uranium mining to waste disposal.

As regards people's health, the impact of the old Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant has already been proven by medical reports in the field of oncology. For example, a report (end of 2017) by the head of the pediatric oncology department at the emergency hospital in Craiova (an academic city of over 300,000 people, located about 60km from Kozloduy) indicates an alarming increase in diseases, especially among children, with symptoms clearly related to nuclear radiation in the south of Romania. It is understandable that the people of Romania and Bulgaria, as well as other Europeans, have great concerns about how the Bulgarian authorities (in the nuclear field) are responding to the safety threats posed by the Kozloduy NPP and the proposed construction of a Belene nuclear power plant.

The cross-border debates relating to new projects at the Kozloduy NPP, including the radioactive waste repository (350,000 tonnes) in Radiana (only 4km from the River Danube, on unstable ground) are examples of non-public debates, presenting ambiguous safety measures.

As regards extending the lifespan of reactors 5 and 6 and increasing capacity of the Kozloduy NPP, this was a clear break from the Espoo convention because Romania was not consulted. Bulgarian authorities ignored the official request from Romania (from Minister Attila Korody) for a full Environmental Impact Assessment report (in a transborder context) and safety and technical concerns were not considered.

A recent landmark decision by the Aarhus convention states that the extension of the lifespan of nuclear power plants always has to go through public consultancy, like an EIA, since there is no guarantee that there won't be an impact on the environment. Therefore the lifespan extension can't be unilaterally decided.

It is important to mention that security concerns at Kozloduy NPP were the main reasons for EU's official request to Bulgaria, as a condition for the country's accession to the EU, to close down units 3 and 4 before the projected time limit.

The evaluations from the expert of the International Atomic Energy Agency (Pre-SALTO expert team) for reactor 5 have reported in 2017 safety concerns due to "reactor and components aging". Technical recommendations were ignored by the Bulgarian authorities and in November 2017 the licence to operate reactor 5 was renewed for a further 10 years (from the 30-year extension period approved by the Bulgarian authorities in 2014).

The Bulgarian Government, supported by the National Assembly on 7th June 2018, decided to suspend the 2012 moratorium on the construction of Belene nuclear power plant (NPP).
In 2012, the construction of Belene NPP was terminated because of "the apprehensions of seismic risk on the site upon which Belene NPP is located, especially following the nuclear disaster in Fukushima". As attested by the European-Mediterranean Seismic Hazard Map developed by the European Seismological Commission in 2003, the site Belene NPP is a zone with high seismic risk. The earthquake of 4 March 1977 in Vrancea (Romania) killed 120 people and damaged one third of the buildings in Svishtov, which is less than 10 km from the Belene NPP site. In the 1980s the Soviet partners proposed to "abandon the site of Belene due to the high seismic risk". In 1990, the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences also concluded that the construction of Belene NPP is not justified and unacceptable.
As these risks and the well-founded arguments still hold true today the construction of Belene NPP would represent an unacceptable nuclear adventurism and significant life-threatening risk, for not only Bulgarian citizens, but also all EU citizens and those of the neighbouring regions. A severe accident in Belene NPP, caused by a destructive earthquake, would lead to tremendous environmental, health and economic consequences for Bulgaria and the Member States of the European Union.

Therefore, the European Green Party demands that the Bulgarian government:

1. Annuls the decision to extend the lifespan of reactors 5 and 6 and close down completely the Kozloduy NPP, a nuclear facility which, in the opinion of international nuclear experts, poses major safety risks for all of Europe.
2. Annuls the decision to reactivate the abandoned project of constructing Belene NPP, located in an area with very high seismic activity (near Vrancea in Romania).
3. Requests the Bulgarian government to stop the development of the construction at Radiana of the national repository for low and medium radioactive waste (350,000 tones, resulting from the closure of reactors 1-4 and from further operation of reactors 5 and 6 for an extended period of 20 years), posing a high risk of contaminating the River Danube with all the related negative consequences on the surrounding ecosystems and future development of agriculture in the affected areas in both Romania and Bulgaria.
4. In addition, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development funding the development of the Radiana radioactive waste repository and any support by other countries should stop immediately to avoid further development of the Kozloduy NPP, too. In February 2018, civil society representatives in Romania, supported by Bulgarian colleagues, registered a complaint to the EBRD about funding the project. The complaint was considered eligible by the Bank's mediators following discussions in Craiova (Bulgarian NGOs representatives were also present) on 22-23 June 2018.

   The European Green party stands for a democratic, clean, transparent, decentralized and safe energy system. Nuclear power plants cause too many problems. They delay rather than help the energy transition in the European Union.