



**20 January 2020**

***EU Green Deal  
Your Interview by the Dutch Media (NRC 9 January)  
Role of Nuclear Energy***

Dear Vice President of the European Commission,  
Dear Mr Timmermans,

A few days ago we read with great interest your interview in the Dutch NRC Media. While the topic of the interview was the broad issue of how to tackle Climate Change and in particular how things proceed in the Netherlands, we were disappointed to see that the headline was specifically and negatively focused on nuclear energy:

***Timmermans: 'Kernenergie? Niet duurzaam en bovendien hartstikke duur'***

It is not true that nuclear energy is not sustainable and awfully expensive.

weCARE is an Alliance of NGOs for whom nuclear is a clean, affordable and reliable energy (CARE), and should therefore deserve a positive consideration and be included in the future very low carbon energy mix, in combination with renewable sources, avoiding a gas lock-in by the same token. We therefore would like to share with you some comments on the substance of your message.

We are pleased to do this as you are in charge of designing and implementing the challenging EU Green Deal, targeting a carbon neutral EU in 2050 and a decarbonisation of up to 55% in 2030... which is tomorrow ! As you said yourself in your interview, decarbonisation is THE central objective... and nobody contradicts anymore that nuclear energy is a very low carbon source.

On the issue of the cost of nuclear energy, we share with you the concern of the escalating costs of newly built nuclear plants in the EU. Clearly the nuclear industry will have to get its act together and regain its ability to build to time and budget. But, for this to happen, a conducive environment has to be set by the responsible national and European authorities, providing the necessary long term vision and predictability for industry to engage and investments to come through. Such a conducive environment has been developed to support renewable sources in the last decade. The same type of positive spirit has to be provided for all very low carbon sources, in a technology neutral approach.

This being said, we want to make two further remarks on the issue of the cost of nuclear.

The first is the “relativity” of costs versus the decarbonisation effectiveness: the 500 billion euros paid by German citizens over 20 years for the Energiewende, for zero decarbonisation outcome until now, would roughly correspond to the cost of construction of 100 GWe newly built nuclear plants – able to reliably provide 25% of the electricity consumed in the EU in a totally decarbonised way ! If such nuclear new build programme is awfully expensive, then the Energiewende also is... and not sustainable with no effect on decarbonisation...

This brings us to the second remark: one should not forget the asset of the existing 100 GWe nuclear fleet providing today already 25% of the EU electricity. This fleet is on average reaching 40 years of age but is able to enter lifetime extensions for an additional 20 years of operation. Calculations by the IEA (May 2019 Report on Nuclear) show that such extensions are the most economic way to produce electricity, including the cost of refurbishment and reserves set aside for waste management and decommissioning. Keeping most of the existing nuclear plants in operation and adding new plants at pace would cover around 40% of the electricity consumed in the EU – reliably and in a totally decarbonised way... for the 20 years to come... giving time for all very low carbon technologies to prove their ability, at global system level, to provide clean, affordable and reliable energy. This would allow the EU to build its Green Deal not on myths but on realities and increase its chances of success and so credibility.

In the interview you indicate that nuclear energy is “naturally not sustainable”, due to the generated long lived high level waste. This topic has been a very controversial point during the discussions on the Taxonomy in the course of 2019... and as far as we are properly informed, the Technical Expert Group did

not conclude on the question, leaving it to a new group of experts to look at it objectively in the coming months.

weCARE's view is that, while indeed waste management is an issue for nuclear, as it is for lots of other industrial sectors and human activities in general (air pollution kills 7 million people each year according to WHO), today safe solutions for nuclear waste management are implemented at industrial scale after 50 years of extensive scientific research and pilot demonstrators. Finland is constructing its deep underground repository to start operation in 2025. The safety concept has been proven and the safety case endorsed by the Finnish Authorities.

Therefore, weCARE cannot agree with you that nuclear is not sustainable. For us sustainability, defined as social sustainability (being beneficial for societies of today and not detrimental for societies of tomorrow), is the result of a balance between environmental protection, economics and affordability, security and reliability of energy supply. There is no silver bullet to solve everything. And, importantly, this concept of sustainability must not solely be used for each source of energy separately, but at global energy system level. This has not sufficiently been done up to now.

Dear Mr Timmermans, we hope that the European Institutions, first of all the European Commission, as guardian of the Treaties (including the Euratom Treaty), will stick with what was declared a few months ago by the Commissioner Canete, considering nuclear energy as the backbone - with renewables - of the low carbon energy future of the Union. This would confirm what other main international organisations, such as IPCC and IEA, also said recently, based on their objective analyses and studies.

We therefore hope that not only high level EU policy documents will put a positive light on the role that nuclear energy plays today and can further play in the future, but that implementing instruments will reflect this also. We have to say that this is not the case till now. Indeed when looking at InvestEU, the Innovation Fund or the Just Transition Fund, nuclear is usually excluded or, at best, ignored. We look to you, in your central role leading the EU Green Deal, to strive for a change.

We remain for sure at your disposal for any further information/interaction you would like to get from/with weCARE, as representative of civil society, promoting in a non-ideological way, a sound mix of very low carbon energy sources for social sustainability, in support of the EU Green Deal.

Yours faithfully,

SIGNED

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weCARE is a Brussels-based alliance of NGOs campaigning in Europe for Clean, Affordable and Reliable Energy. The weCARE website (<http://www.wecareeu.org/>) describes the aims and specific activities of the alliance and lists the current member organisations: Sauvons le Climat FR, Energy for Humanity UK, 100TWh BE, Ekomodernist FI

weCARE is listed in the EU Transparency Register under number 473723535459-78.

Cc: President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson , Director General for Energy Ditte Juul-Jorgensen, Deputy Director General Euratom Massimo Garribba, a number of MEPs of ITRE/ENVI Committees, a number of EU Member States Permanent Representations.