

Statement

By members of the

Advisory Group

Energy Transparency Centre of Knowledge (E-TRACK)
Project Radioactive Waste

We are at the beginning of a major energy transition which will take place during this century. Most people are not aware of this and many countries are still developing a proper framework to address this challenge. To this end, effective public involvement in decision-making, including taking due account of their opinions, is essential for the success of projects that raise major public concerns.

Unless energy policies and projects take account of societal values and principles above the purely scientific and technological they have little chance of implementation. If we can raise the level of knowledge, debate and understanding among the general public it will give policy makers and implementers greater confidence in making long term decisions about sensitive projects and at the same time show how consumers and affected citizens can effectively bring in their own viewpoints and raise concerns.

Nuclear energy and Radioactive Waste Management are examples of such projects. In this area not only governments, regulators and agencies but also research and working groups of international organisations (many of them EU funded) have developed considerable knowledge and also practical experience in quite a number of countries. That is why Radioactive Waste Management was chosen as the first E-TRACK project.

This knowledge is also of general value for other key areas of energy (e.g. wind, transmission lines, shale gas, etc), thanks to the long experience in nuclear energy and RWM sectors, in addressing major public concern through an increasing level of confidence among stakeholders. It is therefore also essential in informing the citizen and supporting their role at the centre of a successful European Energy Union.

The goal of collecting this knowledge and raising at the same time the level of a common understanding among stakeholders, involves the challenge of examining and sharing hundreds of sources and thousands of documents in reports, studies and surveys. This challenge is particularly acute for new stakeholders intending to set up their own projects that aim at effective public involvement.

That is why the Advisory Group very much welcomed the concept of E-TRACK as a potential EU key activity in the field of energy to promote and implement effective public participation in all EU Member States, helping them to implement existing European legislation as well as energy strategies developed by European institutions.

One and a half years after its setting up, the Advisory group has become highly concerned about the current state and future of the project. We particularly note the following issues:

- The allocation and availability of resources from the JRC are failing to match the ambitions of the project
- Over-sensitivity on the existing and potential provenance, verification and use of the data being collected are severely limiting its effective dissemination
- Opportunities to effectively use modern IT communication tools to disseminate information need further creative support

- The founding partnership between JRC and DG Energy has been weakened by the partial engagement by DG Energy in meetings and seminars. This apparent lack of political support might raise concerns regarding the true interest of the European Commission in public involvement in decision making.

The Advisory Group, who are broadly representative of key stakeholders in our energy future, have enthusiastically supported and contributed to the objectives and development of E-TRACK. We would therefore welcome an assurance by both DG Energy and the JRC of their continuing commitment, through the E-TRACK project, to the provision of information on public engagement. The support of stakeholders in setting up effective public involvement methodologies in line with international and European requirements is a key requisite in achieving success in many of the initiatives, projects and programmes which comprise the EU energy strategy.

Furthermore, the Advisory Group would welcome an assurance from the European Commission to further invest in E-TRACK the necessary human, financial and technical capacities in developing and applying proven modern communication tools such as interactive webpages, discussion fora, moderated networks etc, and to enlarge their use to energy areas outside nuclear.

If implemented as originally intended E-TRACK has the potential to make a vital contribution to policy implementation and enhance the image of the European Commission and the EU in the eyes of European citizens.

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