

Energy Club: Report from the Hearing in Hungary 28.4.2006

The environmental authority had the chair of the hearing and described the procedure of the public hearing, emphasizing at the beginning the seriousness of the process and that trouble-makers will be penalized to pay a fine.

The place was full of security people. The only critical participant at the hearing was us, the Energy Club. In fact, there were only about six people asking questions (all from Paks, nobody from the other affected towns).

The interesting thing was that all the people who were there to give answers to the questions, had a label in front of them, saying "PA Zrt." (which basically means Paks NPP). For us it was astonishing, because this included experts from different authorities (such as geological, biological, health, etc.) and people from companies as well, working for Paks only in this particular EIA project. Thus we could not always distinguish among NPP employees, other people who worked in the EIA, and experts from authorities, institutes, academic circles who should have the role of judging the work of the NPP, rather than answering questions instead of them.

Each presenter had only 10 minutes to express their views about the EIA study, and the rule was that only questions had to be answered by Paks, comments and remarks not. And even if the answer was not satisfying for the presenter, he did not have the opportunity to clarify or ask other questions, because according to the rules, each person could only ask once and after the answer came, the next person had to present his questions.

The mayor of Kalocsa asked whether there could be an other public hearing held in his city on the other side of the Danube. The director of Aduköfe said that he doesn't see any reason why this would not be possible.

In our exposé, we emphasized that we do not agree with the size of the possible impacted area (covering only an area with a radius of 10 km around Paks), and asked the authority to extend this, at least, to the whole area of Hungary.

Concerning this issue, last week we wrote a letter to the environmental minister, Mr. Miklós Persányi, together with other NGOs, asking him to supervise this decision and extend the impact area. We also disapproved of the fact that the EIA study neglected dealing with serious accidents. We used arguments from the Austrian statement for that. Our third comment was on the 2003 serious

incident, and we asked the authority not to give the environmental permit to Paks until the remnants of the incident are removed and the consequences are eliminated.

To our comments we did not get relevant answers. Even the director of the environmental authority tried to answer why the serious accidents are not included in the study, which, we think, should not have been his task. (The director told that a serious accident can not happen even until the end of the licensed lifetime of Paks. And anyway a meteor could hit the continent any time which would be just as devastating if not more.

There was an interesting part at the hearing, when to a question asked by a resident of Paks) "Why is Austria included in the EIA process?", a woman answered: "because according to international legislation, neighbouring countries have to be notified automatically about the project". After that we took the opportunity and asked them why then the countries were not notified automatically and why they had to get information through different informal channels. Again, we did not get any particular answer. The director of the environmental authority, after trying to catch his breath for several seconds, answered that the countries have to be notified automatically only, if there is certainty of significant transboundary impacts, which is not the case here.

Our conclusion of the hearing was that the authority regards it as a procedure that had to be and was fulfilled, but nothing else. We do not know how serious are comments and questions were taken (although we have strong suspicions from the answers we got), as we did not get any feedback. We will have the video tape recorded on the spot and the proceedings of the hearing, which we will have a look at again.

To sum it up: The questions were not answered to the extent they could have been. (waste issue was neglected and concentrated only to the L/ILRW, there were misleading numbers, such as Paks producing 40% of electricity in Hungary (the real number is closer to 35%), the answers were always referring to the 'fact' that Paks has no alternative, etc.)

Half of the room was filled by PA Zrt. personnel. At least half of them was from the authorities and institutes taking part in the EIA process.

As you might know, there are certain supervisions which will take place after the EIA process is over, and the HAEA (atomic energy agency) will be in charge of making sure that the technical and

safety circumstances are appropriate, but there will be no chance for the public to have an impact on that process. They referred to this also at the hearing as well.

We called the personal adviser of the environmental minister to have a talk with the minister about the supervision of this process and the possible extension of the impacted area to the whole country.