

OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER OF HUNGARY Peter Medgyessy

April 2, 2004

Moscow-Budapest

Dear Mr. Medgyessy!

It has come to our knowledge that the Hungarian and the Russian government are planning to come to an agreement on the issue of transportation of spent nuclear fuel from Hungary to Russia for storage and reprocessing. This decision is due to be taken before Hungary joins the European Union, in order to avoid stricter control rules of the EU related to nuclear waste storage in member states. We, the undersigned representatives of Russian and Hungarian environmental organisations are in strong opposition to the proposed transportation. We urge you to abandon this plan for the reasons of high vulnerability of nuclear transportation to terrorist attack, also because transportation poses significant danger to the environment and population of the countries through which the spent nuclear fuel would be transported.

Taking into account growing risk of terrorism and low safety standards in Russia it is time to introduce a ban for nuclear transportation as the European Commission suggested earlier (SEC(2003)382 "Les Consequences De La Guerre En Irak Pour L' Energie Et Les Transports", Note d'information de Mme de Palacio, Bruxelles, le 21 mars 2003).

There have already been many protests by citizen's groups, especially in Ukraine and Russia against nuclear transports. We urge you to emphasise your commitment to democratic behaviour by listening to public opinion. Citizens' rights to a healthy environment and access to information are totally ignored by the far less democratic Russian and Ukrainian governments: people aren't informed about the risk of nuclear transportation that could cause great damage to the environment and public health. According to the statistical data of Russian Ministry of Atomic Power, 43% of all nuclear incidents occurs during transportation. We deeply hope you will act as fits the Prime Minister of an EU member state.

We believe that total ignorance of public rights by the governments of post-communist countries can seriously damage the process of establishing democratic traditions in Eastern Europe. The public will must be respected. Eastern governments should run the public participation procedures for such controversial issues like nuclear transportation to allow the public to express its concerns.

Reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel is the most dangerous process of the nuclear-fuel cycle - the largest accident happened to the "Mayak" reprocessing facility in the USSR in 1957 and resulted in the release an amount of radioactivity almost equal to that released in the Chernobyl accident. Furthermore, reprocessing creates additional radioactive waste, nearly 150 tons of waste for every ton of reprocessed spent nuclear fuel. By offering Russia more spent fuel for reprocessing Hungary will contribute to the ongoing environmental catastrophe happening near "Mayak" and to the increase of the plutonium stockpiles that have poor protection against theft.

According to the Russian Law on environmental protection, reprocessing waste will be sent back to Hungary. That will require the construction of expensive storage space for radioactive waste in Hungary and new dangerous nuclear transportation. This is a right way to stimulate new problems, but it is not the way to solve the existing ones relating to radioactive waste.

We urge you to re-think the misguided strategy of sending spent nuclear fuel out of Hungary and then getting back new radioactive waste, as a "disposal" solution. Waste must not be re-located. Investments should be made into research for finding a safe solution for spent nuclear fuel disposal and into the development of renewable sources of energy and energy-efficiency programs in Hungary, to replace the outdated, dangerous nuclear power.

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