

to be released immediately

Government's proposal for a National Energy Programme of Slovenia efficiently challenged by a broad coalition of NGOs

Ljubljana, 10th February - A strong coalition of major environmental NGOs calls on the Parliament to refuse approval of the National Energy Programme (NEP), stressing that the proposal does not meet legal and quality standards. The proposed NEP is in conflict with Slovenia's commitment for CO2 emission abatement under the EU Accession Agreement. The NGOs are acting to ensure that the NEP be a turning point towards increasingly energy and CO2 efficient development of the country and not a mechanism for gaining political popularity in election year.

Almost three years behind the deadline defined by the Energy Act of 1999 the Slovene government adopted the Resolution on the National Energy Programme (NEP) in December 2003. In July 2003 the draft proposal was open for public comments for two months through the web page of the Ministry for Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy (MinESPE). This short exposure of a draft without previous publication of supporting studies is considered inappropriate by the NGOs. The subsequent process was also hasty and non-transparent. A single presentation of the document by MinESPE was geared to the interests of the energy industry. Although the government announced in November that all the public comments had been taken into consideration and included in the Programme, it was obvious that the critical comments of the environmental NGOs did not find their way into the proposed NEP. For this reason the civil sector formed a 'Coalition for a better NEP' which has been working to influence the presentation of the NEP to a parliamentary committee at the beginning of January 2004.

The Coalition advised the parliamentarians and some parliamentary bodies that the proposed NEP corresponds neither to sustainability goals nor to the legal provisions defined by the Energy Law. The Energy Law of 1999 requires that the National Energy Programme be prepared by an integrated resources planning method, considering both the supply and demand options. The NEP does not conform to these requirements, and is presenting a single option as an undisputed optimum. "The document does not provide an adequate strategic basis for the necessary transition to a more sustainable energy path. It also falls short of quality standards of a public policy document." said Mr. Miha Tomšič, who was the "green" energy minister in the first Slovene democratically elected government, and is now an international consultant and one of the country's leading energy experts. Legal and technical criticism was confirmed by the Legislative Service of the Parliament and the Council for Environment Protection of Slovenia.

In January 2004 the decisive actions of the NGO Coalition, supported by several opposition parties, resulted in decision of the parliamentary Committee for environment and infrastructure to organize a public hearing before further proceeding with the document. The Slovenian Youth Party (a member of European Greens) submitted 30 amendments and a MP from the Slovenian Democratic Party, the largest opposition party, submitted a proposal for rejection of the proposed NEP. In the public hearing the government and the supporting energy lobbies aggressively defended the proposed NEP. In spite of the well-substantiated and serious criticism, the proposed NEP may be pushed through the Parliament by the ruling coalition led by Liberal Democracy of Slovenia, and politically supported by the management of the state-owned energy sector. According to Julija Skarabot, the spokeswoman of the Coalition for a better NEP, 'the NGOs will continue vigorous activity even if the hard-line traditional energy programme proposal is adopted in the Parliament later this month. Energy is one of the most important sectors for a more sustainable development. Slovenia is now 75% more energy-intensive than the EU average and three fold more than neighbouring Italy and Austria.'

For further information:

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