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CZECH REPUBLIC

Government rejects Germany's call to abandon Temelin

GERMANY'S OPPOSITION TO the Temelin plant, in the Czech Republic, came to a head when it sent an official message on July 17 to the Czech Republic government urging it to shut the plant, which is located about 40 miles from its border. Rejecting the call, the Czech government said that the country is capable of ensuring the safety of the plant, and that the plant meets international safety standards. Temelin houses two 991-MWe Russian-built VVER pressurized water reactors that have been modified to bring them up to Western standards; Unit 1 is now being commissioned.

Although the German government has been known to oppose the plant, the fight against Temelin has largely been driven by Austria. That may be why this latest challenge, led by Jürgen Trittin, Germany's Federal minister for the environment, nature protection and nuclear safety, and member of the Green party, triggered a drop in the share value of CEZ, the Czech utility, by about 20 percent. This was taken very seriously by the government, which is planning to privatize the state-owned utility to generate much-needed income.

While Austria has gone so far as to warn the Czech government that continuing with the Temelin project could jeopardize its application to join the European Union, Germany has said that the Temelin question can in no way be linked to current negotiations on Czech membership.

The Czech government says it can ensure the safety of the Temelin plant, which has been brought up to Western standards.

In response to the German statement, Frantisek Hezoueky, executive director of Temelin and vice chairman of the CEZ board, sent an open letter to Trittin, challenging his comments and inviting him to visit the plant.

"It is my professional obligation," Hezoueky wrote in the letter, "to respond to your opinion presented as the opinion of the German government on the process of examination of the Temelin Nuclear Power Plant."

Hezoueky's strongest comment came at the end of the letter, when he said, "Allow me, Minister Trittin, to express my opinion that even though our countries currently prefer different methods of power generation, it should not be a reason to spread distorted information and unjustified fear of operation of the Temelin NPP."

The head of Temelin also responded to specific issues raised in the German statement. He pointed to documents prepared by Germany's GRS that assessed the safety of Temelin under a contract made between the Federal and Bavarian environment ministries and the Czech State Office for Nuclear Safety. "I am afraid," said Hezoueky to Trittin,

"that your conclusions are not in line with existing materials at all. Due to incorrect interpretation of the [GRS] documents, your statements have contained considerably distorted facts that have misled the German government and subsequently a great part of German society. I believe this has happened inadvertently and I hope we will be together able to remedy the incurred damages."

He also mentioned an evaluation issued in June by the Atomic Question Group (AQG), which was set up by the European Commission to verify nuclear safety in candidate countries, that is diametrically different from Trittin's opinion. "AQG, just like GRS, did not find any technical problems in the Temelin NPP preventing its startup and operation," Hezoueky said.

Hezoueky had little time for Trittin's assertion that Temelin does not meet German standards in some areas. While confirming that many engineering solutions were not based on German standards, he pointed to the GRS statement that "the regulations of other Western countries, in particular USNRC, are followed in most cases in line with demands of

the licensing authority and according to the application documents submitted by the applicant.” Furthermore, Hezoueky stressed, “the Czech Republic does not need and does not intend to approve individual solutions on the basis of German standards because, in many cas-

es, such standards are different in different Western countries. In spite of it, we will gladly take into account any reasonable comment.”

At the beginning of August, repairs on the secondary side of Temelin-1 (*NN*, July 2001, p. 62) had been completed and the plant was

being prepared to resume commissioning, which requires another 996 tests. CEZ now hopes to have the plant operating commercially before the end of the year.