

TRANSCRIPT

BELGIAN CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON THE INTERIOR, GENERAL AFFAIRS AND THE CIVIL SERVICE

OCTOBER 19, 2016

<https://www.lachambre.be/doc/CCRI/html/54/ic514x.html>

13 Questions from Mr. Jean-Marc Nollet to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Security and the Interior, in charge of Larger Towns and the Buildings Agency on “the expressed concerns from the United States regarding our nuclear security.” (n° 13907)

13.01 **Jean-Marc Nollet (Ecolo-Green)**: Mister President, Mister Minister, as you know, it has been some time now that the Americans have complained of the low security at our nuclear sites, and related risks, notably the use of highly enriched uranium (HEU) from Mol or Fleurus.

We understand their fears, given the larger context: the sabotage at Doel 4, the departure to Syria of individuals who worked at the Doel NPP, the discovery of videos at terrorists' homes, etc. All of this has reinforced the legitimate apprehensions of the Americans.

In an open letter sent to the State Secretary of Energy, multiple American experts expressed their concerns by recalling that at the Seoul Summit in 2012, Belgium made a commitment that the Belgian Nuclear Research Center (CEN) and the National Institute for Radioelements (IRE) would no longer work with HEU and would convert to LEU starting in 2015. This commitment has not been kept.

Mister Minister, when will the commitment to use LEU be fulfilled? What is your reaction to the more recent concerns expressed by the Americans? We have already had the occasion to discuss this issue, but I would like to revisit it with you in order to find out if a specific date to meet this commitment has been set.

13.02 **Jan Jambon, Minister**: Mister President, Mister Nollet, the facilities at CEN and IRE benefit from the same level of physical protection as the nuclear power plants.

The Federal Agency for Nuclear Control (AFCN) ensures that every nuclear site complies with safety and security regulations and implements an effective security system against theft, break-ins, etc. Considering this is the case for all the nuclear sites, the military is present at CEN and IRE.

Without making any compromises to its nuclear security, Belgium has the intention to no longer use HEU, as soon as it is technically and economically feasible. It should be noted that we have to guarantee the supply of medical isotopes essential for screening of cancers in Belgium and throughout the world.

The research programs required for this conversion have been underway at CEN and IRE for a number of years, and in collaboration with the competent American authorities like the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).

However, it is incorrect to say that the date of 2015 had been fixed as a final deadline. The CEN is working on the conversion with the Americans but there will not be conversion until 2022, at least, because existing LEU fuel designs do not yet permit conversion of the Belgian reactor 2 (BR2). The conversion to LEU targets is progressing at IRE and the HEU targets will be progressively replaced in the following years. The regulatory approval process for the LEU targets is underway at AFCN.

13.03 **Jean-Marc Nolle (Ecolo-Green):** Mister Minister, if I understand correctly, for Fleurus, it will take many years, but without a specific timeframe. And for Mol, it will not be before 2022.

13.04 **Jan Jambon, Minister:** It is not possible to convert the BR2 before 2022.

13.05 **Jean-Marc Nolle (Ecolo-Green):** However, it was in 2012 that the commitments were made in Seoul. You say that the date of 2015 was not fixed, that it was just an objective. Nevertheless, when one looks at the time it is taking, we have a real problem in relation to what the Americans want. You were present at the Summit in Washington when the Americans and Nobel prize scientists reiterated the need to stop. They are demanding that this progress more quickly.

13.06 **Jan Jambon, Minister:** This response is the result of a collaborative effort with the Americans. The NNSA is informed and conducts the studies with us.

13.07 **Jean-Marc Nolle (Ecolo-Green):** You mention there are economic reasons that affect the feasibility. You have always had the approach to say that the economic factors were secondary to security and safety. I have the impression that the framework has shifted.

13.08 **Jan Jambon, Minister:** It is clear that we do not want to play with security. We can continue with the existing regulations, but we also have the commitment to convert from HEU to LEU as soon as possible, while staying within the existing security regulations. In second position, after the security regulations, come the economic factors.

We should not proceed faster than necessary.

From the economic point of view, we need this reactor. We will implement the change as quickly as possible, but it must be feasible, which is not presently the case.

13.09 **Jean-Marc Nolle (Ecolo-Green):** I repeat that the introduction of economic factors is cause for concern.

Furthermore, I remain skeptical in regards to your response concerning Mol. Indeed, you have said 2022. That is six more years. In addition, you have not given any specific timeframe concerning Fleurus but have said "several years." These delays seem very long to me given that this is a question of security.

The matter is closed.

--