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EU AND U.S. SIGN NEW AGREEMENT FOR PEACEFUL NUCLEAR COOPERATION

The European Commission and the United States signed in Brussels today a new Agreement between the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and the United States for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation. The new Agreement will provide the basis for nuclear cooperation in research, industrial trade and safety between the two parties.

European Commission Vice President Sir Leon Brittan (responsible for EU-US relations) and Commissioner Christos Papoutsis (responsible for Energy and the Supply Agency of EURATOM) signed the agreement on behalf of the European Commission. US Ambassador to the EU Stuart E. Eizenstat signed on behalf of the US.

Commenting on the agreement, Vice President Sir Leon Brittan said: "This agreement is a welcome complement to the ongoing initiative to deepen the relations between Europe and the United States. It shows how both sides can overcome difficulties in sensitive areas in order to further their common interests."

Commissioner C. Papoutsis stated: "I welcome the conclusion of the US/EURATOM Agreement as an important joint step for establishing fair trading rules for nuclear material while at the same time safeguarding and promoting the international nuclear non proliferation regime. The signing of this Agreement today heralds a new period of cooperation in the nuclear field between Europe and the United States which I hope will be extended to other important energy issues."

The negotiations between the two sides, which have been lengthy and difficult, started in 1992 and ended successfully last May. The new Agreement, which will remain in force for 30 years, followed possibly by subsequent 5-year roll-over periods, guarantees the following framework as long as it remains in force:

1. Any non-sensitive nuclear activities, as well as enrichment up to 20 percent, irradiation of fissile materials and post-irradiation examination involving chemical dissolution or separation of irradiated nuclear material will be freely and unconditionally allowed.
2. Retransfers to third countries will be authorised on a long-term basis according to procedures set out in the agreement.
3. Storage of sensitive fissile material will be possible in any facility that meets the usual physical protection levels.
4. Reprocessing and alteration in form or content (e.g. fabrication of certain fuel elements) of sensitive fissile materials will take place under a generic programmatic consent, in facilities forming part of the list of nuclear facilities ("peaceful program") listed by each party.

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Although the EU is no longer dependent on the US in the nuclear sector, the agreement provides a secure and favorable basis for considerable co-operation and trade between the nuclear industries of the two sides as well as a number of third countries, and provides a durable framework for this trade to expand in the future.

The EU and the US are the two major players in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The new agreement constitutes a strong expression of the political and economic value of the partnership that exists between the two parties. Certain key third countries, such as Japan, will undoubtedly welcome the new agreement as bringing stability to nuclear co-operation and trading in the industrial world.

The European Union, its member states and the United States are fully committed to non-proliferation which forms a key basis of their co-operation. Any form of co-operation under the new agreement is for peaceful use only. It is provided that all material is subject to international instruments dealing with their physical protection and security. In addition safety aspects are covered. The new agreement ensures that internationally accepted levels of non-proliferation and physical protection apply indefinitely to all material and sets an appropriate example for other countries.

Background

The European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community were founded by the Treaties of Rome in March 1957 and are legal bases for the present European Union. The co-operation between EURATOM and the United States in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy dates back to the late 1950s. It was consolidated in a bilateral agreement that entered into force in 1960 and will expire on December 31, 1995.

The co-operation developed over the last 35 years under the existing agreement is valued as highly positive by both parties. For the European Union it provided the framework to import from the US essential materials, equipment and technology that made it possible for the European nuclear industry to reach a high level of maturity. For the United States, peaceful nuclear co-operation with EURATOM provided a major and reliable nuclear trading partner with which there was, from the beginning, a large degree of agreement on nuclear non-proliferation issues which opened the way to the full commitment to the multilateral nuclear non-proliferation regime that both the EU and the US share today.

The Agreement is expected to enter into force in the early part of next year following approval by the US Congress.

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