

# **NUCLEAR WASTE ISSUE IN THE FINNISH PARLIAMENT, A PARLIAMENTARIAN'S PERSPECTIVE**

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## Procedures in the Parliament of Finland

Preliminary debate (First reading) in Plenary Session (70 addresses), a basis for the committee work

The Government's Decision-in-principle is referred to the Commerce Committee (17 MPs) and to the Environment Committee (17 MPs) for opinion.

The Commerce Committee and the Environment Committee organize hearings of experts (in closed sessions 17 experts in Comm.C.)

The Commerce Committee prepares a report taking into account the opinion of Env.C.

The report and the opinion unanimously support the Government's decision.

Final reading in Plenary Session: the Commerce Committee report is debated (88 addresses). (Introduction by the Ch. of the Comm. C. and the Ch. of the Env.C)

Voting in Plenary Session: the Comm. C. report is accepted, three MPs vote against.

M.Tiuri Oct. 21st 2010

## **BACKGROUND FOR THE PARLIAMENT'S DECISIONS ON NUCLEAR WASTE**

The use of nuclear energy in Finland has been developed in a close cooperation between the Government and the Parliament

In 1983 the Government made a decision to promote research and for handling nuclear waste. In 1987 Parliament adopted the Nuclear Energy Act stating the options for the handling of waste (bedrock and export).

In 1994 the Renewed Act was adopted. The export and import of nuclear waste was prohibited. Bedrock repository accepted.

Several Government Whitepapers about Climate Change and Energy Policy.

Parliament has been involved in all above cases which has helped MPs to understand the problems

After the elections in 1999 a new "Rainbow Government": conservatives, social democrats, Left Alliance and Greens. Parliament majority 140/60 (the opposition mostly MPs from the Center).

Tight Government program with details of activities. MPs of Government parties must support it. However, the Government agreed that the Greens and other MPs opposing nuclear power can vote against it. It is probable that to compensate this, all had to support the nuclear waste decision.

In 2000 the Posiva Company asked the Government to make a decision-in-principle on the permit to proceed with the repository plan (disposal in Olkiluoto of waste produced by present nuclear plants).

For the positive result it was useful to submit the nuclear waste issue to the Parliament separately.

In May 2001 The Parliament accepted almost unanimously the Government's Decision-in-principle. Three votes against (two MPs from the Lefts one from the opposition). M.Tiuri Oct. 21st 2010

## COMMENTS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON NUCLEAR WASTE

A pragmatic view: the present generation has produced the waste. It must take care of it. Most MPs thought that the final repository is safer than the long-term water storage.

The requirement for opening the repository in the future for reusing waste. Most of MPs didn't want to accept a really final solution. It was thought that due to development of technology better solutions or reuse of waste would be possible in the future.

Dangers of leakages: many MPs in the committees involved in a very detailed study of the construction and the materials of the waste canisters and also the geology of the Finnish bedrock. They learned much more about technology and natural sciences than before.

The ice age problem. Is the planned repository strong enough to stand the expected ice age? I myself worry more what happens to Finns during the next ice age.

The natural radiation of the Finnish bedrock. Many MPs learned for the first time that there is a lot of natural radiation in Finland. Actually radiation levels are higher than in most countries due to uranium and other radioactive materials in bedrock. Their radiation corresponds the radiation of wastes of 400 nuclear plants.

The final disposal of the wastes of other power plants: Fossil fuel plants: carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, ashes to the ground, combustion plants: fine particles to the lungs of people (WHO: 350 000 people die each year in EU-countries due to the fine particle pollution)

I think that these kind of debates are useful for improving the knowledge level of MPs in energy matters, technology and natural sciences.

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