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Dear Editor,

In Praise of Nuclear Energy

The Fukushima nuclear emergency has given rise to a chorus of doomsday warnings from anti-nuclear groups about the dangers for Britain if we continue to develop our nuclear energy programme. Let me nail my colours to the mast. I have complete confidence in the quality of government-enforced safety checks on our nuclear power stations. Nuclear power in Britain has the most impressive safety record. It is essential in my view that we continue to expand our nuclear programme as an important part of the mix of sustainable energy sources which guarantee the security of our national energy supply.

It is abundantly clear to me that the case for nuclear energy needs to be made over and over again to counter the negative propaganda which is passionately promoted by its opponents. The more I learn about this technology, the more I am impressed by the way that nuclear power can produce vast amounts of clean, low cost energy. In Britain, our 10 nuclear power station network produce around 10 percent of our energy needs, whereas in France their 58 nuclear power stations produce 75% of their national electric power needs. In total, there are 437 nuclear power stations in operation in 31 countries and a further 50 are now being constructed in 14 countries. Currently, they produce 31 percent of the electricity consumed in the EU and provide 15 percent of world electricity needs. These figures surely give emphasis to the confidence that the international community has in this energy source.

Nuclear energy is a proven clean technology which is complementary, not a competitor, to other green energy sources. Nonetheless, in terms of green house gas pollution, it is undeniable that nuclear energy emissions are much lower even than those produced by wind, solar, hydro and biomass energy systems. Nuclear energy emits a negligible amount of carbon over its full life cycle and a study by the UK government Energy Technology Support Unit highlights this advantage. The study calculates the amount of carbon per kilowatt hour of electricity produced. The numbers are striking – coal 955 grams, oil 828, gas 430, hydro and wind both 8 grams and nuclear a mere 4 grams.

A strong advantage for nuclear energy is its long-term price stability. Despite the capital cost of building a nuclear power plant being high, the overall cost per kilowatt hour is one of the lowest of all generating technologies over the full working life. Having a long working life means it is possible to spread construction, de-commissioning, waste treatment and disposal costs over a longer period thereby

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Conservatives in the European Parliament

keeping units costs lower. Above all, it means prices should be stable and predictable over the full working life. The low cost fuel element of nuclear power also makes it far less sensitive to global price hikes as are now experienced with our oil and gas imports. Furthermore, unlike most other clean energy sources, the nuclear electrical output is not affected by weather.

In today's world, security of supply is of paramount importance. To become dependent on one foreign country for our energy supply is very risky. Nuclear fuel comes from around 20 countries and even a total disruption of supply would not cause blackouts for about 3 years because of the existing stockpile of fuel within reactors and in the enrichment process.

Like all complicated technologies, especially those that border on the wondrous, nuclear energy has its sceptics and opponents. Yet if one takes a cool look at the benefits of nuclear energy in today's world, with its issues of pollution, climate change and international threats to our energy supply, then I see no alternative to the urgent implementation of a national nuclear energy programme. We need safe, secure, clean, reliable and affordable electricity from nuclear power. Paradoxically, the events of Fukushima make it even more likely to be the case in Europe.



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