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Evaluation of the regional participation procedures used during the search for sites for deep geological repositories for radioactive waste

First interim report from the research project on
"Participatory waste disposal policy"

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The present research was conducted on behalf of the Swiss Federal Office of Energy within the Radi-
oactive Waste research programme.

Bern, August 2016

Summary

This interim report evaluates the regional participation process which took place within the sectoral plan procedure in the search for deep geological repositories for radioactive waste conducted in the six potential siting regions since the founding of the regional conferences down to January 2015 when the National Co-operative for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste (Nagra) suggested a two-times-two solution. The main aim of this report is to draw up initial recommendations on the basis of the knowledge gained from the evaluation for the benefit of the SFOE, the authority leading the procedure, so steering of the process can be optimised. Further, this report will serve to systematically document, analyse, synthesise and promote regional participation procedures within the Confederation's sectoral planning procedure. The evaluation was made on the basis of a criteria catalogue consisting of 14 criteria each with two to seven sub-criteria (see chapter 1). The criteria consist on the one hand of generally acknowledged principles for assessing the quality of political decision-making procedures, such as fairness, transparency, and stability of expectations. On the other, they include criteria that systematically take into account the empirical deficits of conventional participatory procedures, such as the (lack of) motivation on the part of non-organised members of the population, the predominance of zero-sum conflicts and the (lack of) balance between the various social classes.

In the evaluation use was made of the available documentation and of our own data (gained from guideline-based interviews, written surveys and online surveys) (see chapter 2.1). Based on the documents and data gathered each of the six regions was assessed on the basis of the specific criteria – each region was assessed for compliance with or for the degree of fulfilment of each sub-criteria (*not fulfilled, barely fulfilled, partially fulfilled, largely fulfilled or fulfilled*). Using the assessments for each sub-criterion for each region, the main criterion for each region was assessed and an overall assessment was made of the criterion itself (see chapter 3).

On the basis of the evaluations carried out, it could be seen that the participation process as such has proceeded in a relatively fair manner. One significant negative point was the lack of balanced professional competence on the part of all of the participants. The transparency of the procedure could also be categorised as partially to largely fulfilled, while in this criterion the lack of an open declaration of interests on the part of all participants was the main point of criticism. Early and iterative participation could be categorised as mainly fulfilled and the joint determination of decision-making and procedural rules was found to have been fulfilled entirely. Institutional integration was also deemed to be largely to entirely fulfilled, while improvements are required to make the procedure more suitable for laypeople. Regrettably, the balance between the social classes and between organised and non-organised interests (the latter often consists of non-represented groups in the population such as women, youths and migrants or their descendants) was poor and did not function as well as was desired. The same was determined for the balance between short and long-term interests, while with respect to this criterion the main point of criticism was the lack of a definite representative for subsequent generations. Both the willingness to negotiate and mutual acceptance and respect on the part of all participants were assessed as very good. However, a need for greater motivation was identified on the part of the participants and the non-participating population who are after all most affected by the proposals. Participation at (public) events is fundamentally poor. Professional competence and promotion of such could once again be assessed as

good, if we ignore the lack of balance between those with and those without professional competence. Access to information on the part of the participants and the non-participating population is good, while conversely the comprehensibility of the information provided is not always sufficient for laypeople. The regional participation procedure can transform zero-sum conflicts into positive-sum conflicts because in the end everyone can profit in one way or another. The final aspect, stability of expectations, could be assessed as partially to largely fulfilled because the SFOE has informed the public about the possibilities and limitations of regional participation from the very beginning. Long-term continuation of the participation process with respect to knowledge transfer and retention is not yet fully guaranteed.

Recommendations have been made to the SFOE on the basis of the evaluation process and the assessments made (see chapter 4). The main recommendation consists of suggestions to improve the suitability of the procedure for laypeople. Further, it was suggested that exchange of information among the regions should be encouraged and that better representation of the population within the steering bodies could be achieved (above all through the participation of women and young people). As a solution to the problem of the lack of balance in the professional competence of the participants, it was also suggested that the structure of regional participation be reduced to include just the working parties and the steering committees. This suggestion should only be implemented when a new participatory body is founded due to possible conflicts of aims. Finally, it was recommended that public relations activities should be rearranged so as to be more appealing to the public.