

Challenges in authorization of exploration and exploitation of radioactive minerals in Slovakia

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Slovakia has a long tradition in the peaceful use of nuclear energy which dates back to the 1950s of last century. In parallel with the development of nuclear power uranium exploitation has started. Whereas the development of nuclear power has continued without interruption the uranium exploitation has been suspended during the political and economic restructuring until 2005. There is also a difference in the acceptance of nuclear power by the local authorities in comparison with uranium exploration and exploitation.

Permitting process of exploration activities in the Slovak Republic is regulated by geological law and falls within the competence of the Ministry of Environment. Radioactive minerals are considered as exclusive minerals and their survey is allowed to the applicant only in exploration territory. The exploration area is determined for four years and then extended for additional periods. The opinions of the affected municipalities and self governing regions (which reflect the compliance of the geological project with the objectives and priorities of the economic and social development programs and with the land-use planning documentation) have to be submitted with the application. Meanwhile, the affected municipality and the self governing region are the parties of administrative procedure of designation, change or cancellation of exploration area for radioactive minerals and they have a right of veto. In case, that affected municipality or autonomous region disagree with proposal, the Ministry of the Environment recommends a modification of proposed exploration area.

Extraction of minerals is regulated by the mining act that falls under the competency of the Ministry of Economy. The right to mine exclusive deposits has the organization which has got mining license and which a mining area has been determined to. Preferential right for mining area determination has the company, that exploration area was determined and the research was carried out at their own expense. Opening, preparation, mining, processing, refining of minerals and liquidation of tailings have to be based on a technology that is in accordance with the principle of sustainable development, with requirements for protection of the environment and the best available technologies. The proposed technologies have to be agreed by the Ministry of Environment. However, a license application could be refused, if the applicant does not submit a favourable opinion of the municipality, favourable opinions of the neighbouring villages and a favourable opinion of the self governing region. These provisions were introduced by the representatives of non-profit organizations and at present they represent a challenge for the authorities and exploration and exploitation activities of radioactive minerals as well.

Primary author: Dr JANOVA, Vlasta (Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic)

Co-author: Mr TURNER, Mikulas (Nuclear Regulatory Authority of the Slovak Republic)

Presenter: Dr JANOVA, Vlasta (Ministry of the Environment of the Slovak Republic)

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