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ASN, the French Radiation Protection Authority, is looking for finding ways of facilitating the development of Regional Qualified Experts networks and took recently initiative to create a network of European Radiation Protection Authorities

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1. Development of Regional Qualified Experts networks

Many qualified experts in radiological protection working in the non-nuclear sector (medical, research, industry, ...) feel quite lonely on the spot. Therefore, quite recently, since five years in France, they have set up local inter-sectors or sectorial networks relying both on the e-mail exchanges, internet forums and regular meetings with all types of concerned stakeholders in their region. Year after year, the number of such networks is increasing, as well the number and origins of the participants is also increasing in each network (from a few tens of participants to 100 or more (the biggest reaches nearly 150 participants), starting with mainly only qualified experts, the oldest one is now open to very different stakeholders such municipalities representatives or environment association representatives.

The main goals of these networks are the information and experience sharing, the improvement of the protection radiation culture and of scientific and technological knowledge, the mutual help and the advice on technical issues. "All these are needs clearly expressed by the participants to these networks"¹.

ASN , the French Radiation Protection Authority, is regularly invited to the meetings and uses this opportunity to present for example the evolution of national regulation and to listen to the remarks and requests from the participants. These networks are very good places for free dialog, outside inspection procedure. They appear as new ways for favouring bottom up proposals and discussions. All participants are convinced that they need such structure, that they are very efficient and give them more legitimacy in their own institutions.

Therefore, being convinced of their efficiency in spreading a good radiological protection culture, ASN is looking for finding ways of facilitating new networks in regions where they do not yet exist. For ASN, this new challenge lies upon a real will for allowing the development of theses local networks, for taking out relevant information from the feedback experience of qualified experts involved, without interfering on the management of theses networks.

2. Building a network of European Radiation Protection Authorities

Since ASN got the remit to control radiation protection at unlicensed sites, in 2002, it participated to international working groups in this field such as Euratom Committees, the IAEA, the NEA or the IRPA. ASN had thence the opportunity to learn about the different ways the European directives were applied in individual European countries in regulating the use of radiation sources and nuclear installations. Thought ASN considers that everything cannot be harmonised in the control of radiation protection in Europe, it is convinced that many practices could be harmonised and European regulators should be aware of each other's constraints, know why their practices

¹ Christian Lefaure, 2008, conclusion of an enquiry still in progress.

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differ and best deal with these differences in their activities. Efforts to harmonise nuclear safety in Europe are undertaken among European regulators of nuclear installations (WENRA – Western European Nuclear Regulator’s Association) which also covers radiation protection but all these regulators do not hold the responsibility to control unlicensed sites. An additional forum for collaboration was therefore deemed necessary.

ASN decided to publish two issues of its bimonthly journal “Contrôle” on international radiation protection, one dedicated to international organisations the other to national Authorities and the way they controlled radiation protection. European regulators merely contributed to the later issue and clearly expressed their interest in strengthening their work together in the field of radiation control. ASN therefore organised a first meeting of the heads of European Radiation Control Authorities in Paris on 29th May 2007. This meeting established 5 working groups aimed at discussing the most priority topics for harmonisation, namely : outside workers and the dose passport, the justification of radioactive sources, new medical techniques and patient release, emergency preparedness and action levels and stakeholder involvement and medical practices.

The European Commission (DG-TREN H4) participated to the second meeting held on 19th May 2008 and presented its current work after the presentation of the progress achieved by the 5 working groups established by the heads of European Radiation Control Authorities. The next meeting will be held on 12th December 2008 in Paris and chaired by the director of the Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority (NRPA), Ole Harbitz. ASN is hopeful that a crucial step towards harmonisation of radiation protection in Europe is achieved in line with the European Commission’s responsibility.