

Initiation of a European Platform on Training and Education in Radiation Protection (EUTERP Platform)

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Abstract

In 2004, a feasibility study has been carried out for the European Commission¹ to investigate the necessary steps towards the creation of a European Platform on Training and Education in Radiation Protection (EUTERP Platform). The overall objective of the Platform, when established, is to better integrate education and training into occupational radiation protection infrastructures. The integration and consolidation of national radiation protection education and training is one of the key issues to combat the decline in both qualified experts and teaching facilities. Another objective of this training and education initiative is the promotion of mobility of human resources.

The objective of the feasibility study was to (1) recommend a preferred structure of the Platform; (2) propose a draft action plan; (3) investigate the willingness to participate; (4) investigate co-operation with other international projects and networks; and (5) to indicate which activities need financial support. The paper describes the results and the recommendations for establishing the EUTERP Platform, including options for participation, a structure and a draft action plan.

1. Introduction

In Europe, a common vision for maintaining competences in radiation protection is emerging, focussing on a common denominator for qualification of radiation protection experts, ensured by top level quality for the teaching modules, for mutual recognition of these experts, to give it a European dimension, and for mobility of these experts across the European Union. This paper describes the results of a feasibility study to establish the EUTERP Platform [1]. The Platform, which is essentially a network, should promote a better integration of education and training into occupational radiation protection infrastructures in the Member, Candidate and Associated States of the European Union, facilitate the transnational access to vocational education and training infrastructures, promote harmonisation of the criteria and qualifications for and mutual recognition of Radiation Protection Experts (RPEs), and remove obstacles for the mobility of these experts within the European Union.

2. Results

In order to reach the objectives of the feasibility study, a workshop was organised, which was attended by most of the Member and Candidate States of the European Union. The workshop has been held at CIEMAT, Madrid, Spain, on 20-21 May 2004. The exchange of information and experience during the workshop resulted in a number of recommendations, both on programmatic aspects to reach the objectives of the Platform, and on structural aspects which are of vital importance for a successful, efficient and self-sustainable network after the initial stage. The workshop identified how the Platform could best be established and developed in order to achieve the expected results.

It was concluded that a pragmatic and stepwise approach should be necessary for a harmonised and internationally agreed system of recognition of RPEs. It was also recognised that all countries have developed their own education system over a long period of time and it would be impossible to strive to uniformity in the educational approach. Instead of that, and despite the diversity of education and training systems, harmonisation should be reached by evolution of internationally agreed common minimum criteria for the qualifications of the RPE. Recognition should not only be based on the initial education and training, but also on competence. The Platform could provide the basis for such an international agreement.

¹ Contract number TREN/04/NUCL/S07.31234

3. Programmatic aspects

Nineteen recommendations have been identified dealing with the work programme of the Platform. These were divided in 6 different topics, namely:

- Education and training requirements for RPEs
- Mutual recognition of RPEs
- Education and training as part of the radiation protection infrastructure
- Future training needs in various sectors
- Harmonisation of training materials
- Effectiveness, efficiency and quality management of the Platform.

Pursuant to Article 3(c) of the EEC Treaty [2] the abolition, as between Member States, of obstacles to freedom of movement for persons and services constitutes one of the objectives of the European Union. This means in particular the possibility of pursuing a profession in a Member State other than in which these persons have acquired their professional qualifications. An earlier study to the status of the RPE in the European Union [3] showed a range of interpretations of the definition of the Qualified Expert (QE), as used in Directive 96/29/Euratom [4], in the national regulations. The recommendations dealing with the **education and training requirements for RPEs** were therefore considered to be key elements, which should be addressed with the highest priority by the Platform. It was recognised that in the ENETRAP project [5], carried out in the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission, detailed investigations will take place for the differences in interpretations of the definition of the QE. The results of this project can then be used by the Platform to formulate a common denominator for the recognition of RPEs. The Platform should however not restrict itself to requirements for RPEs, but should also address the differences between RPEs and other persons working in the field of radiation protection, such as radiation protection officers (RPOs), and taking into account job profiles, sector of work, etc. Furthermore, it was considered necessary to develop guidance on the implementation of the requirements into national regulations. This may lead to recommendations from the Platform about actions from the side of the European Commission, preferably by guiding instruments or eventually by legislative actions.

With respect to **mutual recognition**, it was concluded that it is necessary to investigate the systems of recognition of RPEs in the various countries, and specifically to analyse the reasons for recognising, or not recognising, foreign RPEs. Guidance should be developed about who is responsible for mutual recognition, i.e. regulatory authorities, professional organisations, or other bodies. The Platform could play a role in the development of this guidance, or may recommend the European Commission to do so.

It was concluded that guidance and support is necessary on how to establish a common **infrastructure for education and training in radiation protection** throughout the European Union. The Platform could recommend the European Commission on the actions to be taken to implement this common infrastructure. A number of international institutions and organisations have already been active in this field, such as the IAEA, IRPA and the European Federation of Organisations of Medical Physicists (EFOMP). To avoid duplication of work, it is necessary to co-operate with these organisations to promote a consistent approach.

In order to combat the decline in radiation protection expertise within the European Union, it is important to investigate the **training needs and training capabilities** for each sector of work in the various countries. For an effective use of resources, it is necessary to identify how much training activities should be organised in the future, how this should be done and where these activities should take place. It was recognised that in some European projects, such as CETRAD and ENETRAP, carried out in the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission, such investigations will take place for certain sectors of work. The results can be used by the Platform as input for identifying additional work.

It was recommended to peer review national and international **training courses and materials** for compliance with the basic syllabus and for reasons of success or failure. In harmonising training materials, it is recommended to make use of a proven approach to establish standardised material, such as developed by the IAEA [6]. For planning purposes, it would be helpful to establish a database of training materials and training events.

Regarding the **effectiveness, efficiency and quality management** of the Platform, it was considered necessary to develop performance indicators, in order to measure the progress of work, to investigate the impact of the Platform and the success of implementation of recommendations. It is necessary to formalise a system of feedback of information about the success and failure of training events, in order to make it possible to learn from the past and improve future events. Formal quality management or quality assurance methods should be applied to ensure a high quality of performance of the Platform. By inviting other networks to participate in the Platform and by ensuring from the side of the European Commission that project results are made available to the Platform, an efficient use of the results of other projects and other international networks can be made. This could also lead to the identification and formulation of new research in this field.

4. Structural aspects

There was a general consensus about the framework of the Platform, whose structure should ensure an efficient and effective management. It should make it possible to co-operate with other projects and networks and it should be self-sustainable after an initial period of time. The EUTERP Platform should cover all EU Member, Candidate and Associated States. All relevant stakeholders in the field of radiation protection should be represented, in particular:

- National competent radiation protection authorities
- National bodies responsible for professional education and vocational training
- Providers of training and education in the radiation protection area
- Professional organisations representing the receivers of training and education
- International organisations, such as IAEA and IRPA
- Operators and employers.

When all these categories are represented on a personal basis in the Platform, this may lead to a few hundred participants. The large number of participants could lead, however, to a hardly manageable and therefore inefficient Platform. In order to strengthen the involvement in and commitment to the work of the EUTERP Platform at a national level, and to accommodate the input of all categories, it was recommended to establish in each country a group of persons in which each of these categories are represented. Such national groups could serve as outposts for the Platform. They could prepare standpoints on different issues at stake in the Platform, or could carry out tasks on a national level as input for the Platform. It was concluded that this is a prerequisite for reaching a sustainable and self-supporting Platform after a certain period of time.

It was concluded that the Platform should be established by the Commission in a phased approach, and not to embark with an overloaded work programme consisting of all programmatic issues that have been identified. To this end, it was recommended that the Commission could best conclude a contract with a co-ordinator who should, with the help of a Steering Committee, elaborate the recommendations dealing with the education and training requirements for RPEs. These recommendations were considered to be key elements for reaching the objectives of the Platform.

The workshop showed a broad interest of the represented countries to participate in the Platform. The fast responses on the invitations to nominate participants for the workshop, specifically from the new Member States and Candidate States, reflect the great importance that is given by these countries to the subject. The Expert Group according to Article 31 of the Euratom Treaty adopted the recommendations made in the final report of the feasibility study [1] and concluded that the European Commission should take the necessary steps for a follow-up, in order to make use of the momentum. This will also promote the national involvement and commitment to the subject, which is important for reaching a self-sustainable Platform after some years.

5. The next stage: the establishment of an operational EUTERP Platform

In September this year, the European Commission responded to the recommendation of the Article 31 Expert Group and published a call for tender for the creation and a first phase of operation of the EUTERP Platform. The Platform shall be an instrument for Member States aligning their national requirements in order to avoid discrimination of RPEs from other Member States. It shall clarify the role of RPEs in different work sectors, taking into account the definition of the QE in Directive 96/29/Euratom [4] and the guidance given in Annex I of the Commission's Communication [7], and shall ensure a permanent dialogue between all involved parties. Conclusions may be formulated by

the Platform participants including recommendations for initiatives to be taken by the Commission. In this context, the contractor shall establish and operate a permanent office aimed at maintaining the exchange of information and experience between national and international stakeholders, organise specific workshops and issue guidelines and recommendations. The contractor shall elaborate jointly with a Steering Committee, to be nominated by the Commission, a methodology according to the following aspects:

Legal/administrative aspects

- Definition of qualified expert, job profile, minimum training and education requirements
- Harmonisation of national legal and administrative requirements
- Implication of other EU legislation on vocational education and training and on working conditions
- European national infrastructures for training and education.

Functional aspects

- Traceability to the Directive 96/29/ Euratom [4] and the Communication [7] on its implementation
- Identification of needs in specific work sectors
- Harmonisation of syllabus and courses
- Feedback of experience from current training courses of national and international organisations and institutes
- Performance indicators.

It is expected that the start of the operational EUTERP Platform will take place early 2006.

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