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Report from an expert commission on the safety of reactors

The expert commission announced its report on the safety of nuclear reactors in Germany on 17 May. In March this year, the government ordered the commission to carry out stress tests to check the level of safety of all nuclear reactors in Germany. According to the report, none of the seventeen German reactors passed the tests. The three oldest reactors, the operation of which was suspended after the catastrophe at the Japanese Fukushima nuclear power plant, were evaluated the worst. These power plants are likely to be switched off permanently.

The commission was to test the reactors both in terms of threats posed by both natural disasters (floods and earthquakes) and airplane crashes or terrorist attacks. According to the report, the nuclear reactors are the most vulnerable to airplane crashes and the least to threats posed by natural disasters. The report does not indicate clearly which reactors should be decommissioned completely, nor does it provide any foregone conclusion regarding the future of the nuclear industry in Germany. However, both the nuclear lobby and the anti-nuclear lobby claim that the report confirms precisely their point of view. The ecologists emphasise the lack of proper security measures against air catastrophes taken at the power plants. In turn, representatives of the nuclear industry are quoting the opinion of the minister for the natural environment, Norbert Roettgen, according to whom the results of the report must be thoroughly analysed and at present there is no reason to close the power plants immediately and without giving this issue proper consideration.

The results of the report presented by the commission for reactor safety as well as the expected report from the ethics commission are unlikely to significantly affect the federal government's decision to withdraw from the use of nuclear energy gradually (and at a faster rate than was provided in the amendment of the 'nuclear law' of 2010). Intensive work is underway to develop a package of regulations to form the new 'nuclear law', which has to be passed, at least partly, by 6 June, when the moratorium on the extension of the operation of nuclear power plants in Germany will have expired. <AKD>