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The value of exchange visits

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Abstract – Exchange visits seek to improve the knowledge and practices of the visitors and their organisations, and to integrate the experience gained from the visit into their area of work and daily lives. Exchange visits involve organising a meeting between, on the one hand, a group of visitors and, on the other hand, a host group. The aim is to exchange experiences and discover new viewpoints and approaches for a specific theme. The main goal of the exchange visit of Slovak stakeholders to Belarus was to share their experience on the process, methodology and tools used for the improvement of the practical radiological culture of populations living in long-term contaminated areas. This activity was undertaken within the continued work of the local-national forums where national, regional and local actors from Slovakia and Belarus learnt the most essential lessons in relation to post-accident management and rehabilitation, with the main goal of improving both national and local plans for preparedness and recovery.

Keywords: exchange visits / sharing experience / practical radiological culture

1 Introduction

A technical visit of a stakeholder group (11 participants) from Slovakia to Belarus within the WP3 activities in the framework of the NERIS-TP Project took place from June 1 to June 7, 2013. Those involved in the technical visit to Belarus interacted closely with the European NERIS Platform for the mutual benefit of all actors.

Two topics were blended together during the visit:

- (1) improvement of national-local cooperation in Slovakia and Belarus, and
- (2) radiation control and dissemination of radiological culture through the centres for practical radiological culture, implemented and coordinated by the Research Institute of Radiology (RIR).

The Slovak stakeholder group was formed by representatives from different professional organisations, authorities, experts, and the local government and population as follows: emergency planning experts from VUJE, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Kalna nad Hronom Municipality¹, the Mayor of the Madunice Municipality², the Section of Crisis Management of the Ministry of the Interior, the Nuclear Regulatory Authority, the Public Health Authority, the Slovak Medical University in Bratislava (Slovak Radiation Monitoring Network), the

¹ Mochovce NPP District, member of the GMF – Group of European Municipalities with Nuclear Facilities.

² Bohunice NPP District, member of the GMF.

Slovak Hydrometeorological Institute (Radiation Monitoring Network), and the Police Academy (Public Administration and Crisis Management).

2 Bragin district – complex attitude towards the emergency response and countermeasures in long-term contaminated areas

The programme of the visit was very comprehensive, and very valuable and fruitful for both parties. The stakeholders first visited Bragin on June 3, 2013, where a seminar took place with 32 participants on the issues of emergency response and countermeasures in long-term contaminated areas, as well as emergency and post-accident preparedness and recovery. Focus was given to the cooperation of the national and local stakeholders within the emergency response structure and in the post-emergency period, with illustration of the radiological protection applied to the population of the Bragin district of the Gomel Region. The experiences of the Slovak stakeholders were presented as well, and the emergency response organisation related to the Bohunice and Mochovce operational Nuclear Power Plants was of particular interest to the Belarusian stakeholders.

After the seminar, the Slovak stakeholders visited the centre for practical radiological culture – a governmental one situated in Bragin (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Visit to the centre for practical radiological culture in Bragin.



Figure 2. Visit to Bragin Historical Museum with Art Gallery – Chernobyl theme.

The visit to the museum where exhibitions presented the theme of Chernobyl and the history of Bragin (Figure 2), and the film presenting the Chernobyl catastrophe and life after it were very touching, and the experiences presented by the eyewitnesses and real stakeholders of the consequences remain in the minds of all.

3 International scientific conference

The International scientific conference “Nuclear and radiation safety: lessons of Chernobyl and Fukushima” took place the next day, June 4, 2013, at the Research Institute of Radiology in Gomel, which brought together representatives and experts of Belarusian, Japanese and Slovak research and regulatory organisations (Figure 3).

The major objective of the Conference was to discuss the latest research achievements and share the experience of different institutions on their practices related to development

and improvement of preparedness and response systems in the event of nuclear and/or radiation emergencies. The conference focused on the issues of overcoming the consequences of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster using the post-Chernobyl experience. The speakers also covered radiation protection and rehabilitation issues, and social and psychological rehabilitation of the affected population and information dissemination (Conference Proceedings, 2013).

4 Local information centres for practical radiological culture at schools

The technical visit finished on June 5, 2013, with visits to the local information centres for practical radiological culture created at the secondary schools in Luninets and Vulka-2 in the Luninets district of the Brest Region (Figure 4).



Figure 3. International Scientific Conference “Nuclear and radiation safety: Lessons from Chernobyl and Fukushima”.

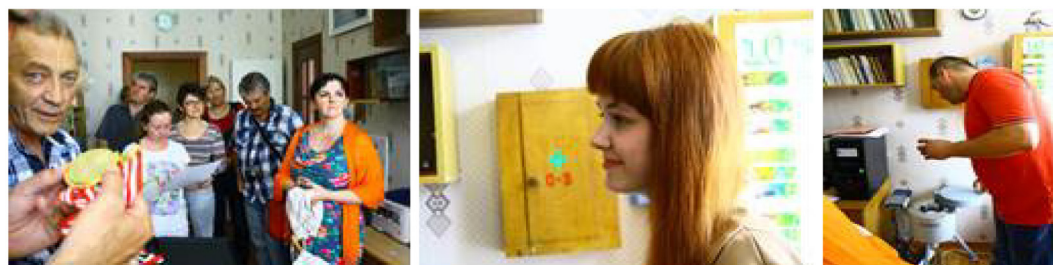


Figure 4. Local information centres for practical radiological culture created at the secondary schools in Luninets, Brest region.

The practical presentations, dialogue and discussions took place in a friendly family atmosphere. The topics were related to the history and current situation, and also to the research of the young generation and life in the contaminated area nowadays. This activity was especially essential for the engagement and active direct involvement of the mayors of Madunice and Kalna nad Hronom Municipalities from the Bohunice and Mochovce Nuclear Power Plant Districts, who are members of the Group of European Municipalities with Nuclear Facilities (GMF).

5 Conclusions

The exchange visit offered a wide range of benefits, well beyond just acquiring information. This visit has created common understanding, relationships forged in the hardships of shared experience, commitments to new approaches and friendships as a foundation for future networking.

The technical visit allowed the Slovak stakeholders and Belarusian hosts to focus time and attention on a topic, learning in depth, sharing ideas, and assessing the relevance of new approaches in the area of post-accident management and rehabilitation, with the main goal of improving both national and local plans for preparedness and recovery. The essential

information that came alive, through dialogue, was detailed in response to specific queries, and conversations were enriched by the perspective of distance and difference. The chance to look behind the scenes, and get acquainted with real people, understanding their problems and achievements, created the inspiration to keep working and launch new initiatives in both countries.

The shared experiences of all participants will contribute to the enhancement of nuclear and/or radiological emergency preparedness and post-accident recovery, and will make the process of stakeholder involvement at all levels from local through to regional and national more complex, comprehensive and meaningful. The experiences from the process of overcoming the consequences of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster using the post-Chernobyl experience confirmed the importance of the improvement of both national and local plans for preparedness and recovery.

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