
ARMENIA'S METSAMOR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT POSES THREAT TO REGION

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Armenia poses a threat to regional security not only through its military provocations and policy of occupation but also with its outdated Metsamor nuclear power plant (NPP), which experts consider to be dangerous.

"Armenias Metsamor nuclear power plant, which is located in a seismic region, poses a threat to the region," Azerbaijani Ambassador to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Galib Israfilov has said in an interview with the weekly edition of the Nuclear Intelligence Weekly of the energy company Energy Intelligence Group.

Israfilov said that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) does not have mechanisms to address these concerns as Armenia is unwilling to consider these issues.

Firstly, the Armenian government must demonstrate the political intention and will to be more transparent with its neighbours in the region, and also to be more forthcoming regarding concerns about the safety of the NPP, he said.

Israfilov also stressed that IAEA, which has only a bilateral agreement with Armenia, cannot trigger any mechanism to enforce Armenia to do it.

In the meantime, you cannot address the concerns regarding Metsamor outside the context of security in the region. And the security is seriously undermined by the Armenians armed aggression unleashed against Azerbaijan, and its continued occupation of our territories, said Israfilov.

Israfilov reiterated the position of the Azerbaijani side, emphasizing that the Azerbaijani Armed Forces do not target any civilian objects and infrastructure in Armenia. No such task has been set for the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, and all speculations on this issue are unfounded, he said.

Israfilov also spoke about Azerbaijan's cooperation within the IAEA, mechanisms for controlling the peaceful use of nuclear energy by the international organization, opportunities for action in a multi-territorial framework and other topics.

In the meantime, despite Metsamor NPPs risk to the region, Armenia seeks to operate this nuclear plant until 2026. The Armenian government has agreed with Russian nuclear agency Rosatom to keep the plant running beyond its original closing date of 2016.

Experts have long been voicing concerns over Metsamor's danger to the region.

Antonia Wenisch of the Austrian Institute of Applied Ecology in Vienna has called Metsamor 'among the most dangerous' nuclear plants still in operation, saying that a rupture 'would almost certainly immediately and massively fail the confinement,' in an article published at National Geographic.

There is an open reactor building, a core with no water in it, and accident progression with no mitigation at all.

"It is in the midst of a strong seismic zone that stretches in a broad swath from Turkey to the Arabian Sea near India," the article said.

Polish politician and Member of the European Parliament Anna Fotyga also raised the questions about the possible threat of the nuclear power plant to the regional security in 2017.

Metsamor Nuclear Power Plant in Armenia is the last of its kind outside Russia that still uses an outdated model from the 1960s. The Soviet model of using a pressurised water reactor is often cited as the most dangerous kind of nuclear power plant, as it does not meet the minimum required safety standards. In addition, Metsamor is situated in an active earthquake zone just 30 km from Yerevan, and as such poses a potential threat to the Armenian capital and the whole South Caucasus region, Fotyga said.

MEP Fotyga noted that smuggling of nuclear and radioactive materials from Armenia was observed, thus Georgias security services could prevent a number of such cases such as smuggling of highly enriched uranium.

Metsamor, which was built in 1969 during the USSR and now is the only VVER 440, Model 230, operating outside of Russia, is still functioning.

It should be noted that the Metsamor nuclear plant does not have any containment vessel. Its VVER-440 reactor lacks a shell that would contain radiation in the event of an accident.

The US government has called the NPP ageing and dangerous, while the EU envoy had called Metsamor a danger to the entire region. Armenian expert on energy at the UNDP Ara Marjanyan told BBC that the design of our VVR-type reactors is rather old. For instance, they do not have concrete containment domes to contain possible explosion debris.

Five years ago, the Members of the EU Parliament Heidi Hautala and Ulrike Lunacek, who served as Vice President of the EUP as well, also questioned the threat and out-of-dated design of the Metsamor NPP in a parliament session and reminded that in 2012, the parliament adopted a resolution recommending the closure of the Metsamor plant before 2016.

<https://www.azernews.az/aggression/167884.html>

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