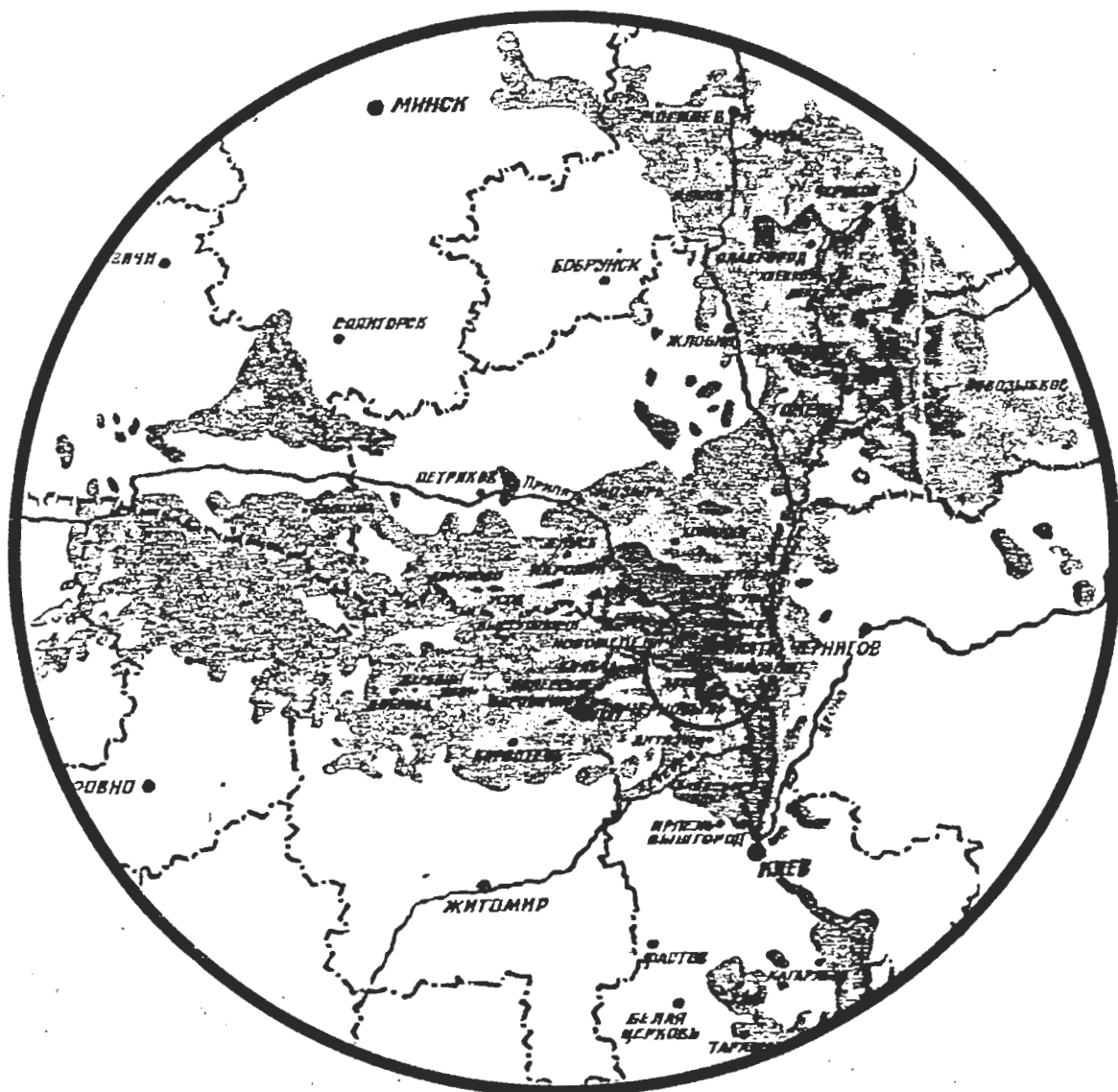


THE INTERNATIONAL CHERNOBYL PROJECT

AN OVERVIEW



ASSESSMENT OF RADIOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES
AND EVALUATION OF PROTECTIVE MEASURES
REPORT BY AN INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

May 1991

Chapter One: The International Chernobyl Project

Introduction

The accident at the Chernobyl power plant occurred on 26 April 1986. A brief chronology of some relevant events up to the inception of the International Chernobyl Project is given overleaf and a more extensive account is presented in the Appendix.

In October 1989, the Government of the USSR formally requested the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to carry out:

“... an international experts’ assessment of the concept which the USSR has evolved to enable the population to live safely in areas affected by radioactive contamination following the Chernobyl accident, and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the steps taken in these areas to safeguard the health of the population.”

The response was a proposal for a multinational team to undertake an assessment of the radiological situation in the three affected Soviet Republics — the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR), the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The International Chernobyl Project was thus arranged, with the participation of the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Labour Office (ILO), the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The Project was formalized at a February 1990 meeting in Moscow at the headquarters of the USSR State Committee on the Utilization of Atomic Energy. Some twenty-five representa-

tives of the USSR, the BSSR, the UkrSSR and the IAEA took part in discussions on the goals of the Project and the methods to be used in achieving them.

The Government of the USSR had already benefited from international assistance with this problem. The WHO sent a team of experts in June 1989, as did the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in early 1990. The final report of the WHO group concluded inter alia that: “... scientists who are not well versed in radiation effects have attributed various biological and health effects to radiation exposure. These changes cannot be attributed to radiation exposure, especially when the normal incidence is unknown, and are much more likely to be due to psychological factors and stress. Attributing these effects to radiation not only increases the psychological pressure in the population and provokes additional stress related health problems, it also undermines confidence in the competence of the radiation specialist.” The Report of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies indicated inter alia that: “Among the health problems reported it was felt that many of these, though perceived as radiation effects both by the public and by some doctors, were unrelated to radiation exposure. Little recognition appears to have been given to factors such as improved screening of the population and changed patterns of living and of dietary habits. In particular, psychological stress and anxiety, understandable in the current situation, cause physical symptoms and affect health in a variety of ways.”

It was clear that the assessment of the Chernobyl accident had already involved extensive efforts and it would not be necessary for the Project to undertake a totally new, comprehensive assessment of the situation. Rather, the task would be to assess the quality and correctness of the existing results. Secondly, to be manageable, the

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