

The nuclear power at the heart of the debate 27 - 28 March in Paris

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The nuclear revival is a reality all around the world. France and other European countries have major industrial advantages in this technology. But "the European political clock is running slow, which is a great handicap. A political-strategic approach is what is needed". This message from Anne Lauvergeon, CEO of AREVA, is a good indication of the general tone of the European symposium organised by Confrontations Europe in collaboration with Ceres and the Entretiens Européens in Paris on 27 and 28 March.

Faced with the risks of climate change, the 256 participants arriving from all over "Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals," recognised that "even if nuclear power is not the only solution, there will be no solution without nuclear power", as was stated by Gérard Mestrallet, Chairman of SUEZ.

All of the large companies represented at the symposium, such as Enel (prohibited from producing nuclear power in Italy), E.ON and RWE, have understood this and do not wish to be excluded from the rapidly changing electricity market.

Without reaching the same levels as in China, India, the USA or Russia, there are some important projects in progress in Europe. After Finland and France, the British have now resolved to build 23 plants in the United Kingdom over the next 10 years, and this major decision is set to transform the European nuclear market.

Nuclear power is not recognised however in the European energy mix: this is a national choice, and one that remains taboo in the Council; member states are divided and its acceptability in public opinion is fragile.

The European Commission is aware of this and is taking various initiatives: Dominique Ristori, Deputy Director-General for DG TREN, reminded us of the role of the newly created Prague/Bratislava Forum and the setting up of a high level group for waste management and safety, which are the basic conditions for long-lasting revival.

All those participating at the symposium expressed a wish to go further. They have explored avenues for being more proactive and offering the European nuclear industry better opportunities for development, thereby meeting the world's and Europe's extensive needs. This is important if Europe is to become energy independent, and to create a competitive market offering the lowest possible electricity prices to guarantee the non-proliferation and the peaceful use of nuclear power around the world.

A number of concrete proposals were put forward:

- the creation of a European academy, as suggested by Walter Hohlefelder, would meet the skills shortage that was pointed out by Jean-Pierre Leroux, Vice-Chairman of the CEA: just 35 nuclear engineers are today graduating from British universities for 9000 available positions!
- the implementation of an approval procedure for all of Europe for the building of plants, or possibly greater cooperation between countries that wish to do so in order to "reassure the markets" for the financing of plants, as explained by Patrice Lambert de Diesbach from CIC Crédit Mutuel.
- the setting up of export guarantees for components from different countries, as proposed by Rolf Linkohr, so that Europe is on a par with suppliers in the international arena.

Discussions emphasised the need for "long term contracts", which would allow the large electricity consumers to benefit as much as possible from nuclear production and lower, more stable prices.

The last morning of the symposium was devoted to the issue of energy policies outside the European Union. Kirill Komarov, Deputy Director of Atomenergoprom, who journeyed especially

from Moscow, stated that Russia would be part of the tendering process like any other nuclear producer. This, as was the case in Bulgaria, could lead to cooperation with European manufacturers. He spoke of President Putin's offensive policy involving a complete fuel cycle offer (from enrichment to reprocessing) that would guarantee non-proliferation, an offer that the European Union would do well to take inspiration from if it is to fulfill its commitments.

Helmut Schmitt Von Sydow stressed that energy is a strategic public resource, and yet the Union does not have an external energy policy; it is obliged to act only within the scope of the trade policy, and an embarrassing "grey zone" surrounds investment. Philippe Herzog said that he believed the new proposals made here could become reality within the context of the Lisbon Treaty, but that there were still two major handicaps: the absence of a European energy mix and of an external strategic action capacity: "either the Union should be granted competence, or we should proceed on the basis of stronger cooperation."

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, just back from London, came to inform us that the debate would carry on under the French presidency, without affirming that it would reach a conclusion, and he insisted on the firmness required to secure supply.

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