

Editorial

In the context of high oil, gas and coal prices, and of ever deepening and more specific anxieties about global warming, France seems to have decided to use its EU presidency from July to December 2008 to do everything to persuade its European partners that a massive resurgence in nuclear energy is absolutely necessary. This will, of course, be to the great benefit of France's industry. Nicolas Sarkozy has made it a key point of the 'energy/climate package' whose negotiation he hopes to have completed by the end of his European mandate. He has received significant support from the current President of the European Commission for this initiative, which has been widely debated across Europe.

More widely, the French President has undertaken nothing short of an international crusade on the subject, focusing in particular on Mediterranean countries such as Morocco and Algeria, to whom he has proposed active collaboration with French industry and the French Government, stressing the advantages of such cooperation in the "war on terror". In so doing, he is relying on the global reputation which France and its industry has acquired in this field by tirelessly extolling the virtues of energy independence and the economic boost that large-scale nuclear electricity production can bring to a country's energy system, while being environmentally harmless and perfectly safe, secure and long-lasting.

This line of argument, developed over decades by French governments both right and left, and the nuclear lobby which is closely linked to them, has managed to take hold in a France weak in independent expertise. This weakness has been deliberately maintained by the authorities and the elites, who prefer the comfort of an almost religious consensus to the debate which would inevitably be triggered by an independent and unrestricted evaluation. The French President is counting on the self-declared virtues of nuclear energy and the exemplary nature of the French experience to convince Europe, which is very divided on this issue.

In this light it seemed especially important to our association Global Chance (which includes among its members several of France's few independent nuclear experts, and produces analyses in the fields of energy and the environment whose relevance is appreciated both in France and beyond) to offer European decision-makers and citizens a fact-based critical analysis of the French experience, so as to shed a more realistic light on the illusion of a nuclear 'earthly paradise' that France is trying to impose on its European partners. Global Chance thereby hopes to alert international opinion to the largely illusory nature of any plan for a massive international and European revival of nuclear power as a means of meeting the challenges of development and the environment.

First we question the capacity of such a revival, even supposing that it met no technical, political or economic obstacles, to make a decisive contribution within the required timescale to the underlying goals of the 'energy/climate package': European energy security and a massive reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the short and medium term (20% to 30% by 2020, 75% by 2050).

Second, using the example of France we investigate whether the proponents of such a revival have the industrial and economic capacity to carry it through, and the ability to contain its consequences and risks for the environment, peace and the health of the population.

This publication appears at a time when in France, more or less for the first time, the wall of silence that the authorities have erected around the more or less serious 'incidents' that have peppered the history of the country's nuclear industry is beginning to crack. In the climate created by the possibility of a revival of nuclear power, the French press has taken a greater interest than usual in the various incidents that have occurred in June and July 2008 (the halting of work on the Flamanville reactor site by the French nuclear safety authority, radioactive pollution in the water table at Tricastin, a fire in the Finnish EPR etc). Both the press and public opinion have rediscovered the obscurity which in France cloaks the whole management of nuclear power's inherent risks, and the disdain for the populace that this implies.

This is just one more reason to make this dossier, which we have entitled *Nuclear power, the great illusion*, widely available both to the public and to decision-makers.

Global Chance

