

### Macron: Europe must prioritise emission reductions

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**The European Union must ensure it retains sovereignty over energy and climate, French President Emmanuel Macron told the European Parliament last week. Reducing emissions must remain a priority for Europe, and replacing phased-out nuclear plants with coal would not achieve this, he warned.**



In an introductory address to a debate on the future of Europe, Macron said Europe was distinguished from other powers by its "common commitment" to issues including the protection of the environment, climate and health. The USA, he said, was "facing the temptation" of disengaging and rejecting multilateralism, climate and free trade issues. He called on Europe to defend its commitment.

Macron said climate and energy sovereignty is indispensable to the EU, and called for the bloc to reopen the debate on increasing European contributions under the Paris climate change agreement. France would push for a minimum price and a border tax for CO2, he said.

France currently obtains about 75% of its energy from nuclear, but the French government in 2015 established an energy transition law which set a target of reducing the share of nuclear in the power mix to 50% by 2025. During the debate which followed his address to the Parliament, Macron said French reductions in the share of nuclear power must be at a pace which allows

the country to retain energy sovereignty.

"Nuclear â€¦ does not emit CO2," he acknowledged. "If the closure of power plants leads to the reopening of coal plants, which was the case in Germany unfortunately, you degrade your CO2 balance, which is exactly contrary to the Paris agreements, and if the acceleration of this pace â€¦ leads to increasing dependence on [some] non-European sovereign power, especially Russia, to import energy, is not a good decision. I therefore fully assume to have an energy strategy that has a top priority: reduce emissions," he said.

## EU at a crossroads

Nuclear energy currently provides 27% of the EU's electricity generation and 50% of its low-carbon electricity, but the European nuclear energy sector faces several challenges, Yves Desbazeille, director general of European nuclear trade body Foratom, said last week at the World Nuclear Fuel Cycle (WNFC) conference in Madrid.

Desbazeille identified several key challenges at the EU level. EU goals on energy and climate remain ambiguous, with goals for both carbon and renewables. This has meant that that specific targets in the European Commission's Clean Energy Package tabled in 2016 to set out a post-2020 regulatory framework - including the role of nuclear - cannot be set. Individual states have the freedom to decide their own energy mix, but some countries such as Austria and Luxembourg have made legal filings against the use of nuclear power by other countries. The UK - a major advocate of nuclear power - has decided to leave the EU.

Desbazeille said the position of France left a "big question mark", but said Macron's speech had been a "positive signal". Macron, he said, had "made it very clear that the German Energiewende [the policy of closing all of its nuclear power plants by 2022 and aiming to replace them with renewables] was totally missing the point."

Nuclear energy contributes to all the European Energy Union's key energy objectives of environmental sustainability, competitiveness and security of supply, Desbazeille said. The EU currently imports 54% of all its energy, and has an external energy bill of EUR1 billion per day. Six member states rely on Russia to supply all their gas, while Russia and Norway are responsible for 50% of the EU's gas supply and 40% of its oil. On the other hand, the cost of uranium imported into the EU is EUR2 billion per year, from a range of suppliers around the world, and the cost of nuclear power is less vulnerable to fluctuations in uranium prices. Aggregate stocks of uranium held in the bloc would be enough to fuel the EU's reactors for about three years.

"The EU is now at a crossroads and must make long-term decisions," Desbazeille said. "Will it rely only on renewable solutions and take the risk of blackouts or will it take the smart route, where renewables and nuclear each can play their role?" he asked.

## Nuclear voice

France is a symbol and proof of concept for a high nuclear share following policy decisions taken in the 1940s and 1950s, Myrto Tripathi, president of Voices of Nuclear, told the WNFC. The stability and load-following capability of the country's generation sector has increasingly seen it acting as a central stabiliser of the European grid.

However, French plans to reduce nuclear's share mean that - along with some other European nuclear generating countries such as Sweden and Switzerland - it is at risk of passing legislation that is adverse to nuclear, she said.

Germany's Energiewende is being held up as a "proof of concept" for decarbonising without nuclear, but studies have found that seven years and EUR25 billion after the decision to pursue this policy the only objective that has been met is an increase in Germany's share of renewables. Germany is increasingly basing its grid stability on the capability of its neighbours, she said.

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<http://www.nicenter.org.tw/modules/news/article.php?storyid=12126>

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The French government's decision to close the Fessenheim nuclear power plant when the Flamanville 3 EPR begins operations is for purely ideological reasons, Tripathi said. She highlighted several other issues that could also affect the future of France's nuclear programme, including public perceptions of nuclear and the "increasing appropriation" by policymakers of "myths" including the "impossible dream" of 100% renewables.

"The need for nuclear has never been so great - nor has opposition to it," she said.

Voices of Nuclear is an NGO which aims to provide nuclear employees a channel to express their support for and pride in their industry.

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