

The European Commission penalizes nuclear energy at the expense of the fight against global warming

France must take action so that the development of nuclear energy is fully supported at both the European and the national levels.

Last September 7th, the European Commissioner for Budget and Administration, Johannes Hahn, stated in a press release that the European Union would launch in October the issuance of green bonds, with up to 250 billion Euros by 2026. As part of the European recovery plan, these bonds are intended to finance "sustainable" investment and infrastructure supporting the energy transition and contributing to the objectives of the fight against climate change. Johannes Hahn said that these bonds will be able to finance gas power stations "under certain conditions to provide a solution of transition in the production of energy" and that these bonds "will in no way be able to finance investments in nuclear energy".

This confirms the European strategy that emerged with the publication of the first delegated act of the taxonomy in April 2021. This classification of activities eligible for financing by the recovery plan excludes from electricity production any energy sources that emit more than 100 g CO₂/kWh, thus gas, but it also excludes nuclear power, whose sustainability is deemed not yet proven; at this stage, gas is considered a transitional energy that is not sustainable. The final conclusions are deferred to the second delegated act, to be published at the end of 2021 or in the course of 2022.

The arbitration will thus proceed with the second delegated act, and will rest on groups of experts mandated to evaluate different aspects of the use of these energies. Several of these have already delivered their conclusions regarding nuclear energy: the first one emphasized its value as a means to fight global warming; two more, whose expertise is more specific, have evaluated its impact on health issues on one hand and the absence of significant harm to the environment during the full life cycle on the other hand (DNSH Do No Significant Harm); all these experts have come to the conclusion that nuclear energy is eligible for inclusion in the taxonomy and in green investments.

Today, all the metrics give a green light to nuclear energy as a contributor to the energy transition in the framework of the European recovery plan. The major environmental factor is the low CO₂ emissions generated: according to the IPCC, the CO₂ emissions per kWh are: 12 g for nuclear power, 490 g for gas-fired power, 820 g for coal-fired power. Yet, it is with no delay that the Commission declared the exclusion of nuclear power from its green bonds, while including gas-fired power as a transition energy.

Clearly, excluding nuclear energy while resorting widely to intermittent renewable energies, leads, given the absence of massive and cost-effective storage technologies, to falling back on natural gas in the long term, with the resulting CO₂ emissions, thus reducing the capacity to limit global warming. Moreover, the use of gas is a major strategic error when it results in European states, poor in gas resources, becoming dependent on supplier countries, especially if one of them becomes dominant,

as may be the case with the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, currently being completed between Russia and Germany.

Today, France is, along with Sweden, the most efficient country in the European Union in terms of greenhouse gas emissions thanks to the production of its nuclear power plants. It must preserve its nuclear assets, which already provide a positive environmental balance, a satisfactory economic performance as well as an industrial independence that is appreciable in the current international political context. In addition, France must resume its forward march in the development of nuclear energy, improving its achievements on all fronts. It must strive to convince as many as possible of its European partners to join forces in elaborating an ecological and efficient European Union policy that distances itself from German stances. The first priority is thus to obtain that nuclear energy be included in the recovery plan for Europe and the NextGenerationEU Green Bonds, immediately upon the next introduction stage.

The French government and its representatives in the European organizations must then:

- Take action, in conjunction with the many member states open to the development of nuclear power in the fight against global warming, to ensure that all aspects of nuclear power proceedings (extended operation of today's reactors with the "major refurbishment" campaigns, development of new 3rd and 4th generation reactors, R&D) are included in the taxonomy and in the recovery plan.
- Oppose the classification of gas as a green energy and at the very least insist on a strict limited time frame in the event of its integration as a transition energy in the European policies; it must be, indeed, only a transition energy.

The credibility and success of the European Union's action for the climate are at stake.

Moreover, all studies show that nuclear power will play a role in the planet's energy future. If Europe still has any industrial ambition, it must not leave the world's nuclear market to China, Russia, India and the United States. It is in Europe's best interest, and it is in the interest of France, the only European country that has this expertise.

If it were to exclude nuclear power from the taxonomy, Europe would lose its credibility in the fight against climate change and would shoot itself in the foot with respect to its industrial development.