

The Return of Nuclear Power to the European Commission?

On March 10, the second World Nuclear Summit was held in Paris, under the auspices of France and the International Atomic Energy Agency. In her speech, the President of the European Commission described the decades-long sidelining of the major role that nuclear energy can and must play in contributing to a decarbonized, affordable, and reliable energy mix as a "**serious strategic mistake**". The global geopolitical situation and recurring crises make the use of nuclear power increasingly necessary, for today, tomorrow, and the day after.

An opinion has just been published by SLC, arguing for the right choices that must now be made, beyond words and intentions. Building on existing nuclear power by extending the operation of reactors is the obvious solution. Next, a fleet of large reactors must be built to prepare for future needs, while simultaneously developing advanced reactors and closing the fuel cycle. Small modular reactors, on the other hand, can serve specific purposes, including heat production.

The article also addresses the question of the respective shares of nuclear power and (intermittent) renewable energies. What needs does the combination of the two energy sources, one dispatchable and the other not, address? What should the order of priority be? Finally, what does the famous "technological neutrality" that is repeated to us like a mantra actually mean? Not clarifying first these questions leads to facing the following issue: can an electricity market—assuming this concept even has any meaning—that arbitrarily prioritizes intermittent and unpredictable renewables function without incurring astronomical material and financial costs for storage and grid adaptation?

After the Commission President's mea culpa, words are no longer enough; action is now needed: all obstacles to nuclear development, particularly those concerning specific competition rules and the financing of new nuclear projects, must cease. The Commission will be judged on its actions and will definitively disqualify itself if it fails to align its actions with its words.

However, immediately after her speech, the European Commissioner announced the allocation of €200 million for nuclear power and €30 billion for wind and solar energy. Is this truly consistent with her rhetoric and in the best interests of Europe?