

NUCLEAR POWER IN THE NEW EUROPE

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The future of nuclear energy in the United States and the world at large is dependent on the answers we give to the question of waste management.

France is Europe but Europe is not always France in particular in the field of energy. So, with no apologies, these views are rather Gallic in bias.

On the other side of the Atlantic a drastic reshaping of the world is taking place. The achievements of these new republics is difficult to predict.

While Europe is better known as the Old Continent, so much of world-wide significance is happening now, that today, history is being made in the New Europe.

1. The old expression "All quiet on the Eastern front" is no longer true.

A major shake-up is taking place. The tensions accumulating for many decades are leading the ideological tectonic plates to drift from East to West.

The Iron Curtain Fault, which is the ideological equivalent of the geological San Andreas Fault, is disappearing along with the crumbling down of the political, social and economical barrier embodied by the Berlin Wall.

2. Meanwhile, another carefully controlled fusion process is developing -- the steady, accelerating process towards a single market in the European Community.

The goal of Europe 1992 is the tightening and strengthening of the economic links between the twelve members of this community. The Twelve will continue their efforts towards the constitution of a confederation or a federal union of the states.

In view of these developments, the real question is, Where will these progressive moves lead to in general, and in the energy field particularly.

1. The evolving rapport between the East and the West is a good thing. It moves in the right direction and obviously, peace is a positive element for international trade, not a negatively one.

In addition, there is a great deal of concern the safety of the Eastern power plants reaches the same level as that of the European and American plants.

It is also anticipated that, as the people from those countries improve their standards of living, their energy requirements will also increase. This will provide new opportunities for Western technologies and supplies.

One major American concern regarding the single European Market, Europe 1992, is the question, will it be a

closed market with a policy of protectionism? Another question is the only response. Do Americans lack so much faith in themselves that they fear dealing any partner stronger or larger than most states? That is too unbelievable.

What is believable is that the new Europe will be an open one, if it wants a future, and that it will be in the interest of the United States to deal with a strong and responsive partner on a balanced basis.

2. Just as importantly, whether Americans or Europeans, we are all on the same boat, Planet Earth. We share the same problems in nuclear energy and we face the same challenges.

The situation might look different depending upon nationality, but it is not different. All nations share the same problem of public acceptance, the same concern for final disposal of wastes, and the same difficulties maintaining a nuclear power industry with so few, if any, orders for new plants.

Considering the French situation, France has long been considered a kind of Superman. This is due to its nuclear program developing smoothly and because its public opinion apparently seemed quiet, if not supportive. Those in France knew this to be a very unstable situation which resulted from a constant effort to teach, to explain and to promote understanding. But it could not last if the opposition to nuclear energy abroad kept growing and winning.

France is not a Superman, only mortal. Due to strong, violent demonstrations, the Prime Minister has frozen the exploration of nuclear waste repositories for at least one year. A few weeks ago that was unimaginable.

At the same time USDOE was filing a legal suit against Nevada to proceed with site characterization of Yucca Mountain as a possible repository.

France is not yet in such a hurry due to vitrification technology. Also, because of canister storage on site, France has a storage period of about 15 to 20 years. Yet, both difficulties are the same in substance.

Since the problems are global, not local, will globalizing the problems globalize the solutions?

Its undisputed that nuclear energy has a promising future to satisfy the growing energy needs of the industrialized and developing countries. Why? Because nuclear

energy is a proven, safe and competitive technology. Also because it has a positive impact on the environment.

The move towards globalization of the industry has started. In Europe Framatome, the French vendor, has merged its activities with those of Siemens, the German vendor. Also, across the Atlantic the Swiss and Swedish Company, ABB, is married with Combustion Engineering, and Framatome is already cooperating with Babcock & Wilcox in the fuel and nuclear services activities. Framatome is also contemplating a further involvement with B&W for the nuclear reactors, with Siemens, in the framework of NPI.

In summary, France is confident of the role that nuclear energy will continue to play in Europe. And yet, the New

Europe is not and will not be uniform. The situations will be somewhat different according to the countries.

France is already heavily committed to nuclear energy and will continue assessing the different options without dogma, for the fuel cycle as well as for the reactors. The further disappearance of national barriers between countries, along with the accompanying free flow of electricity among them will show the clear advantages of nuclear power generation.

Finally, a tighter international cooperation is the recipe for success. A stronger, wider Europe acting with the United States and hopefully, Japan, will give new impetus to the nuclear power programs domestically and abroad.