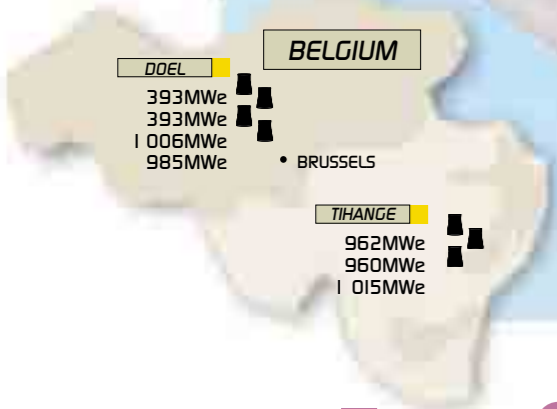




Belgian nuclear power stations

Electrical energy from nuclear sources is generated in seven power stations on the Doel and Tihange sites.



Atomium of Brussels (Belgium).

Belgium The end of nuclear?

At the beginning of 2003, Belgium became the second European country (after Germany) to renounce generation of nuclear powered electricity, with an operating lifetime of reactors limited to 40 years and a ban on new power stations. Will the new government coalition confirm this choice?

The law voted on December 6 last year by the House of Representatives and confirmed by the Senate on January 16, 2003 organized for termination of the Belgian nuclear power program. The government mentioned several reasons, first the intention to shutdown a system that generates waste and “leaves a potential danger for future generations”. Another stated objective is to reduce the “increased” risk of the proliferation of fissile materials in a world environment in which threats from uncontrolled groups are increasing. Finally, the Belgian government would like to protect the population against the danger of an accident,

which although improbable, is considered as being “unmanageable” if it occurs. In its current state, the law requires the Belgian electricity producer (CREG) to implement measures to replace the generation of nuclear powered electricity, first with fossil fuels (oil, coal and gas) gradually making up the difference, since the share of renewable energies will remain very low (1.1%). At the moment, apart from the nuclear, Belgium produces 37.9% of its electricity from conventional thermal power stations (including coal 12.5%, gas 23.3% and fuel oil 2.1%), the remainder (4%) being supplied by hydroelectric energy and other renewable energies.

TRUE OR FALSE

Belgium has the second highest proportion of nuclear-generated electricity in the European Union.

TRUE
Its ratio of nuclear powered electricity is 56%, the highest after France (76%).

Opinion of Robert Leclere, ELECTRABEL Communications Manager

“It is clear that the German decision in 2000 to stop using nuclear power had a significant impact on the Belgian decision. There was, no doubt, concertation between the Green Party Ministers in Europe on this subject, and this was one of the conditions



set by the Green Party for its participation in the government at the time of the May 1999 elections. Everything could change now. The principle to renounce the use of nuclear power was included in the coalition agreement signed at that time. As you can imagine, Belgian electricity operators fought against this decision since they could not see how Belgium could manage without nuclear power. In particular, they regretted that this important decision was not preceded by a detailed

analysis of the situation, considering technical, economic and environmental aspects. Admittedly, a *force majeure* clause in this law allows for continued use of nuclear power up to the last moment, if the analysis by the regulatory organizations shows that the energy security of the country would be threatened. But the situation will become worse as the date on which the first reactor is due to close (2015) becomes closer. We cannot afford to make a mistake with a step that would be irreversible”.

Nuclear in Europe

Seen by Pr. André Berger

“Terminating nuclear powered electricity at the beginning of the twenty-first century would not only be an anachronism, it would be a mistake. Continuing to develop nuclear electricity is an efficient way of supporting sustainable development... France must remain firm with its nuclear program. Otherwise, electricity generation in Europe would become bankrupt after the decisions made by Belgium and Germany, and also Italy and the United Kingdom, to stop using nuclear power. None of the countries mentioned can satisfy its internal electricity demand and at the same time uphold its Kyoto commitments on greenhouse emission gases. The solution lies essentially in the production of electricity without emitting CO₂. The only genuine help

comes from nuclear powered electricity. But to understand this, the problem needs to be analyzed objectively, without subjective and sectarian arguments. In a field as sensitive as this, the only way to calmly approach the truth is to hold discussions based on specific facts – since the arguments used against nuclear power are not justified. Whether we like it or not, our civilization is a risk civilization. Nuclear powered electricity is one of the lowest risks that we have to face. Considering the decision of some European countries to ‘opt out’ of nuclear power, we should expect that large amounts of electricity will be purchased from France, Finland and Sweden in coming years, three European countries that maintain an ‘intelligent’ attitude towards energy.”

