

CLOSE GAROÑA

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The Minister of Industry, Jose Manuel Soria, has confirmed in the Congress of the Popular Party held in Seville the will of the Government to revoke the decision to close the Garoña nuclear power plant in 2013, adopted in the last legislature by the Socialist Government and endorsed by the previous Parliament.

The plant is over 40 years old, it is fully amortized, its technological design is very obsolete and its contribution to the Spanish electrical system is marginal: barely reaching 1%. Consequently, Cerrarr Garoña does not present the slightest problem for the electricity supply. However, if the life of the reactor is extended until 2019, the fundamental objective of the Spanish and international nuclear industry is favored, which is to achieve the maximum extension of the life of the existing plants, which generate huge windfall profits, the famous benefits Fallen from the sky. Having lost the game for the construction of new plants in Europe and the United States, the nuclear industry desperately seeks to maintain its presence and profits in the electricity business by extending the life cycle of the reactors as much as possible.

The minister's statements have caused deep discomfort and concern among the citizens of Vitoria-Gasteiz, the European Green Capital, which is located just 45 kilometers away from the plant. The mayor himself, Javier Maroto, has described the decision as an "error", words supported by the deputy general of Álava, Javier de Andrés, although at the moment of truth the popular group has endorsed the position of the Government in the vote carried out carried out in the General Meetings, leaving both leaders in a testimonial position. Affirming that the decision is based on "technical" and not "political" reasons, as has been stated in some instances, is a smoke screen with which an attempt is made to hide the openly pro-nuclear position that since the days of the Aznar government and Loyola de Palacio as European Commissioner for Energy and Transport has distinguished the Popular Party.

The debate on Garoña has a historical story and an international context that should be rescued, especially now on the first anniversary of the Fukushima Daichii catastrophe.

Nuclear power has been since its inception at Calder Hall (United Kingdom) in 1956 on the wrong side of history. The commercial exploitation of atomic energy arose historically as a by-product of the development of nuclear weapons. Franco even launched a nuclear program aimed at getting atomic weapons. Declassified reports from US intelligence have brought to light that the Franco regime harbored for years the desire to turn Spain into a nuclear power similar to France and Great Britain. Within this frame of reference and with this hidden purpose, it was Generalissimo Franco who inaugurated the Santa María de Garoña (Burgos) power station in 1971. Spanish democracy dismantled the military program at its root, but inherited the civil one.

Regarding the context, three notes. The first, economic, to better understand why new plants are not going to be built in the foreseeable future in free market economies. After decades without connecting new plants to the electricity grid in Europe and the United States, the construction of the Olkiluoto plant (Finland) was presented a few years ago as the flagship of the nuclear renaissance. The project has been, however, a complete financial fiasco that has ended up in court. Accumulates four years behind schedule and a budgetary deviation of 100%. The final investment is estimated at 6,600 million euros. A capital cost of more than 5,000 dollars/kilowatt, when, for example, the average cost of investment in a gas plant is 800 dollars/kv (Update of the cost of nuclear power, Du and Parson, MIT, 2009).

Second, the inevitable contrast with renewables. In 2010 there was the symbolic moment in which the installed capacity in renewable energies throughout the world -wind, plus biomass, plus solar

(without counting hydraulics)- reached 381 Gigawatts, surpassing the 375 GV of the atomic park. Nuclear power is a 20th century technology. Renewables are already the 21st century.

Third, security, the definitive argument. Coinciding with the 25th anniversary of Chernobyl, the Fukushima Daiichi disaster occurred on March 11, 2011. Verifying that not even the most technologically advanced nation in the world was capable of adequately controlling such a serious nuclear accident, made Germany, the main economy European Union, decide to close the seven plants built before 1980 and agree in Parliament on the orderly closure of the remaining nine by 2022.

Surely, nothing better expresses the sign of the times than Siemens, the multinational that has built the power plants in Germany and a good part of the rest of the world, has closed its nuclear division. Switzerland, Belgium and Italy have followed in the German wake, moving away from atomic energy.

Fukushima has also exposed the hidden costs of nuclear technology. The Japanese government has seen the need to provide Tepco -the company that owns the plant- 64,000 million dollars to meet the demands for compensation of the 89,000 people displaced from their homes and ensure the continuity of control work and recovery of the destroyed plant. The astronomical economic cost of the accident thus passes into the pocket of the taxpayer.

Referring to the similarities in risk management in the financial and nuclear sectors, the Nobel Prize winner in Economics Stiglitz has expressed it with a round phrase: "A system that socializes losses and privatizes profits is doomed to mismanage risk "(Playing with the planet, EL PAÍS, 04-11-2011). Notice to boaters. One year after the Fukushima disaster, however, Minister Soria has had no qualms in stating emphatically that Garoña should not be closed in 2013 because "we would lose cheap energy." This is how the accounts are presented from some centers of power.

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