

Ideas & Debates by Jérôme Ferrier

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Gas, an opportunity for France!

Paris is getting ready to host the June World Gas Conference and the December World Climate Conference (COP 21). This is a unique time for France which, as its Senate is about to review the preliminary bill on energy transition, has to be exemplary in the field. But do not be deceived: if France wishes to be the example in Europe, it simply cannot allow gas to be "sidelined" as is still the case in this preliminary law. Over the last two years, stakeholders have all joined forces to work towards its preparation; we could have expected the preliminary law to engage the country towards an environment-friendly, economically sustainable energy-oriented decision. And yet, what do we have?

The truth is that gas has been forgotten in this agenda, given a 60% gas consumption reduction over the next ten years is the aim, as is the case with other fossil fuels and that the respective carbon print results have not been taken into account. A distinction must be drawn here.

France considers that the only clean energy is electricity, even if generated from a primary, nuclear, renewable or fossil energy and as the carbon footprint of this country must incorporate the entire power production line. Now for each kWh of electricity production, 450 grams of CO₂ emission are generated by gas versus 800 grams for coal, an over 80% differential! GCP, the Global Carbon Project, a reference international body confirmed that a new CO₂ emission record high had been reached in 2013 on the planet and yet, France is still a coal-user for power production in particular: in 2013 a + 20% coal consumption increase has been recorded. Coal-fuelled power plants are used while less polluting gas-fuelled plants have been shut down. Even better or worse, in 2013 carbon emission levels decreased by 2.5% within the European Union countries versus a.....0.6% increase in France.

Coal-fuelled power plants are active yet less polluting gas-fuelled plants are shut down. Re-commissioning would allow a 60% reduction of our emission... and more competitiveness.

Coal is deleterious to our health (Health and Environment Alliance), hence France should take the lead in Europe and voice the need for restricting its use whilst evidencing why and how gas is the ideal transition and also destination energy, besides other renewables, as an essential component of the "energy mix" goal, associating protection against climate change and our economic competitiveness.

It is first an energy offering more than two centuries of easily accessible reserves across the globe, due to sophisticated infrastructures, such as gas transmission and distribution networks, storage facilities and LNG terminals: they all play in favour of renewables by providing an answer to their intermittence and over-production situation. Gas will become an increasingly green and cleaner energy thanks to the production of domestic, municipal or agricultural waste-derived biomethane in France. Biomethane is currently injected in the French networks from 6 sites. Last, gas is a competitive energy.

We seem to get closer to the solutions. Beijing is banking on gas as a fuel, while France has decided not to include gas in defining clean vehicles. What was the reason? Re-commissioning the gas-fuelled power plants, replacing the old coal-fired power plants by modern ones could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by over 60% per kWh produced, taking the whole life cycle into account. Why not share with our partners the idea of putting the currently mothballed combined cycle gas power plants back to operation?

Gas is an accessible, affordable, environment-friendly energy. Gas is not the energy of the past, but a great asset for our country; it can serve as a tool towards French leadership in mastering the issue of climate change, the hallmark of a European and global energy policy.

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