

UNITED KINGDOM

New-build projects to go ahead despite “Brexit”

According to reactor vendors, the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union is not expected to halt the three established power reactor projects.

Britain’s exit from the European Union—dubbed “Brexit”—was decided by the June 23 referendum in which 52 percent voted in favor of Britain’s leaving the EU versus 48 percent voting to remain. As the vote was so decisive, Prime Minister David Cameron not only accepted the decision of the voters in what he called a “clear” result, he also said that he would resign, stating that the negotiations to disengage Britain from the EU should be done under a new leader.

Despite the uncertainties that this will create throughout the country, including on the future of the nuclear industry, Britain’s exit from the EU will not change Electricité de France’s nuclear strategy for its U.K. business, EDF Energy, according to Jean-Bernard Lévy, chairman of the



Lévy

Lévy said the result of the referendum will have no impact, as EDF’s strategy “is not linked to Great Britain’s political affiliation with the European Union, so we have no reason to change it.” He also referred to statements by U.K. Energy Minister Andrea Leadsom, the spokesperson on energy for the Brexit camp, who, Lévy said, had “on numerous occasions and again in recent days come out in favor of maintaining the decarbonization policy, of main-

taining the nuclear option, and of maintaining the Hinkley Point project.”

While Leadsom’s boss, Amber Rudd, the secretary of state for energy and climate change, campaigned on the side of remaining in the EU, she was equally adamant. “Government has prepared the ground for a fleet of new nuclear stations,” Rudd said at a recent conference.



Rudd

“We remain committed to new nuclear power in the U.K. to provide clean, secure energy.”

EDF was not the only nuclear company to announce that there was no reason to change course. According to media reports, the two other groups developing new-build projects in the country, Horizon Nuclear Power and NuGeneration, also expected their projects to go ahead.

Tom Greatrex, chief executive of the Nuclear Industry Association (NIA), said, “We must not lose sight of the fact that we have significant challenges to replace retiring electricity generation plants, to improve our energy security, and to reduce carbon emissions, and that has not changed as a result of the referendum. The nuclear industry will work with policymakers here and in the EU to maintain the confidence in low-carbon baseload power and high-quality decommissioning, which is a vital part of the U.K.’s industrial, engineering, and scientific footprint.”

In another show of support, the NIA and the French Nuclear Energy Society have signed a memorandum of understanding

to work together to further strengthen the nuclear sectors in both countries. The NIA said that the agreement recognizes the need for continued cooperation between the French and U.K. industries as new nuclear generation is developed in Europe.

Meanwhile, the uncertainties associated with such a momentous act may yet have an impact on the nuclear program, particularly if, as many expect, attract-



de Rivaz

ing investments to finance major infrastructure projects, such as nuclear power plants, becomes more difficult. Furthermore, despite Lévy's stated commitment to Britain's and EDF's nuclear plans, the company's continu-

ing delay in announcing a final investment decision for the project is a warning for many that the company could cancel the project. On July 4, however, EDF announced that it has concluded its consultation with French employee representatives and reconfirms its confidence in the Hinkley Point C project, "which has now reached the stage for the board's final investment decision."

For Britain's unions, the Hinkley Point C construction go-ahead is seen as the first big litmus test that major infrastructure projects will proceed in Britain following the Brexit vote. This is the message behind a letter to Vincent de Rivaz, the chief executive of EDF Energy, from the heads of the four trade unions representing workers involved in the project. The letter also notes that the U.K. trade unions are 100 percent in support of Hinkley Point C.

"It would be a tragedy, in both France and the U.K., if all this work and the extraordinary opportunities it provides were to be lost," the letter states. "The moment to make the decision is upon us, and we have a genuine fear that any further delay will lead to the unravelling of all that we have fought so hard to achieve."—*Dick Kovan*