

Green bomb?

Why EU taxonomy could pave the way to further nuclear weapons

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There is great concern that investments in nuclear energy are to be classified by the EU Commission as sustainable and thereby as worthy of financial support. France is not only pleased because of the many existing and planned nuclear power plants. Civilian use has always had a Siamese twin, namely military use – which is at least as exciting. The reactor and the bomb are closely linked, because know-how in the civilian sector is also useful for a military program.

Just over a year ago, French President Emmanuel Macron declared, "Without civilian nuclear energy, there is no military use, and without military use, there is no civilian nuclear energy." Just a few months earlier, Macron served up a "strategic dialogue on the role of nuclear deterrence" to his EU partners. For Wolfgang Ischinger - head of the Munich Security Conference - the "Europeanization of France's nuclear potential is a perfectly correct idea," and he is not alone in Germany in this view. Macron's predecessors - Nicolas Sarkozy and Jacques Chirac - offered participation and dialogue in nuclear deterrence in the context of the EU defense policy. That the nuclear power Britain has left the EU gilds the geostrategic value of each French warhead.

The European Defence Paper of the EU Institute for Security Studies also presented scenarios "in which the national nuclear forces of EU member states (...) may enter the equation either explicitly or implicitly." The recent debate on the civilian Siamese twin should thus make one prick up one's ears.

National interests

France is playing the European card when it comes to asserting its national interests around the globe. From a Parisian perspective, it is the EU, not the U.S.-dominated NATO, that matters. EU military deployments in former French colonial jurisdictions or armament projects such as the new fighter jet system are just a sample. Under the current French presidency of the EU Council, the Strategic Compass is to be adopted in the next few weeks, which also envisages a rapid EU reaction force. Could more "green nuclear power" also favor EU military deployments in uranium-rich countries?

On many foreign policy issues the EU excels in disunity. When the Australia deal, which France thought was a sure thing, slipped through its fingers and nuclear-powered submarines from Great Britain, of all places, came into play instead, the harsh condemnation by the EU was surprisingly swift. The new security alliance of the U.S., U.K. and Australia threatens to drain France's geopolitical waters in the Indo-Pacific.

Painting "civilian" nuclear power green, while giving an olive green drab over EU military deployments, arms exports and new arms developments has two faces: The EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, pushed by Emmanuel Macron and the French EU Commissioner for Internal Market and Armaments Thierry Breton.

Austria has unquestionably positioned itself in both arenas - "civilian" and military nuclear use: No greenwashing of nuclear energy and no peacewashing of nuclear weapons. Now the strategic game must be made more generally visible.

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