



Nuclear: CNCNCK welcomes the Belgian government's action

The Belgian State is initiating a strategic shift to secure its electricity supply by investing in nuclear power. This initiative is welcomed by CNCNCK, which is calling for an ambitious and sustainable agreement.

The Belgian State and the Engie Group have signed a letter of intent to begin exclusive negotiations regarding the State's acquisition of all of Engie's nuclear activities in Belgium. A memorandum of understanding is expected by October 1, 2026.

CNCNCK, which has long been committed to maintaining and developing nuclear energy in Belgium, welcomes this government initiative. Pending an agreement—which it hopes will be positive—decommissioning operations are suspended for the duration of the negotiations.

A nuclear fleet under pressure

To date, Belgium's nuclear fleet consists of seven reactors. Two of them have been kept in operation for a period of ten years, in accordance with an agreement concluded by the previous government.

However, national electricity production, even when supplemented by gas-fired power plants and renewable sources, is no longer sufficient to meet consumption. This situation forces Belgium to import large amounts of electricity, mainly nuclear-generated power from France.

A major economic challenge

The economic consequences of this energy dependence are considered worrying. The cost of electricity, heavily influenced by gas price volatility and imports, is a handicap for the Belgian economy.

By contrast, electricity production from fully amortized nuclear power plants ensures a stable and relatively low cost. In a context of geopolitical instability, this advantage is seen as crucial for both industry and households.

Without prejudging the outcome of negotiations between Engie and the Belgian State, CNCNCK emphasizes the strategic importance of the existing nuclear fleet, as well as the value of human expertise within the sector.

Extending reactor lifetimes

Limited by the 2003 law to an operating period of 40 years within a cautious regulatory framework, nuclear reactors can, according to many operators, run longer after potential replacement of major components and thorough inspections to comply with current safety standards.

In Belgium, the law requires a periodic safety review every ten years, under the supervision of the Federal Agency for Nuclear Control (FANC), without setting a maximum operating lifetime.

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The Doel 4 and Tihange 3 reactors, commissioned in 1985, have thus been authorized to operate until 2035, for a total lifespan of 50 years—as has already been the case for Tihange 1 and Doel 1 and 2.

Evolving international standards

In several Western countries, the operating lifetime of nuclear power plants now reaches 60 years, particularly in France, Northern Europe, and the United States. Some American reactors are even authorized to operate for up to 80 years.

If 60 years becomes the standard, the Belgian nuclear fleet has significant potential for value optimization, covering two generations of commissioning:

- 1975: Doel 1, Doel 2, Tihange 1 (60 years = 2035; 80 years = 2055)
- 1982–1985: Doel 3, Doel 4, Tihange 2, Tihange 3 (60 years = 2045; 80 years = 2065)

Recognized expertise

Upgrading currently shut-down reactors to modern technical and safety standards would require in-depth assessments. However, Belgium has recognized expertise in nuclear energy and safety.

The country benefits from a strong legacy, notably with the construction of the first PWR-type reactor in Europe, BR3, at the Mol Nuclear Center (SCK CEN). This facility has helped train numerous engineers and technicians.

Furthermore, the work carried out on this reactor in collaboration with the engineering firm Tractebel and the laboratory Laborelec has provided internationally recognized expertise in the understanding of materials used in reactors and their aging.

A strategic choice for the future

Without prejudging the outcome of negotiations between the Belgian State and Engie, CNCNCK considers that maintaining and developing nuclear energy is an essential lever to ensure low-carbon, stable, and competitive energy.

For the organization, Belgium has all the assets—industrial, technical, and human—to make nuclear power a cornerstone of its future energy strategy.