

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1812/03
by Miquel Mayol i Raynal (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: Electrical power line in Northern Catalonia

The French electricity carrier RTE wishes to create a third (400 000-volt) electrical power line, linking the French and Spanish states through Northern Catalonia (i.e. the territory which forms part of the French region of Languedoc-Roussillon). At present, two ultra-high tension (400 000-volt) lines (THT lines) link the Spanish state to nuclear power stations in France via the Pyrenees (Cantagrità-Herman on the western side and Bajara-Vic on the eastern side). There are also two 225 000-volt lines (Pragueres-Biescas and Arkale-Mougerre).

With this new line, the French public-sector electricity company EDF ('Electricité de France') hopes to strengthen its commercial position in the Iberian peninsula. The agreement between the Spanish and French governments provides for participation in the Hidrocantábrico company by the German electricity company E-Bw, which is owned by EDF, in exchange for measures from the French authorities to permit the reinforcement of the existing links between the two states.

The territory of Northern Catalonia is crossed (or will be in the future) by lines and links of multiple kinds: the THT line, the high-speed rail line, the Rhône-Barcelona aqueduct, the dual-carriageway motorway, the gas pipeline, etc. The present project is being fiercely contested in the territory's social and political milieu: the 'Conseil Général' ('département' council) and the municipal councils of all 41 local authorities affected have expressed their opposition, banding together under the slogan '400 000 volts - no thanks!'. It is argued that the line will damage farmland and create electromagnetic fields which will have an adverse effect on the inhabitants' health. Its construction will also provide a justification for the French state to retain its nuclear power stations and, indeed, to build more.

Does the Commission consider this to be a priority project in the context of the trans-European energy networks? Does it intend that it should be cofinanced?

Does the Commission believe this project to be compatible with the promotion of sustainable development (as one of the pillars of the Lisbon process) or the policy of promoting alternative energy sources?