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Hinkley Point nuclear plant gets go-ahead

£18bn power station is 'monumental disaster', say green campaigners

Graham Ruddick

Britain is set to get its first new nuclear power station for a generation after the directors of the French energy firm EDF yesterday voted to start building Hinkley Point C.

After a decade of debate about the controversial £18bn project, the board of EDF approved Hinkley Point C by just 10 votes to seven, according to sources close to the company.

The UK government, which backed the project heavily when David Cameron was prime minister, is likely to welcome EDF's commitment after years of uncertainty. However, Hinkley Point C could eventually cost British taxpayers almost £30bn in subsidies to EDF and its Chinese backer.

The government and EDF will now sign the contracts for Hinkley Point C, which will be built on the Somerset coast, although the formal documentation may not be completed until the autumn to allow Theresa May's government to familiarise itself with the details of the project.

Greg Clark, the business and energy secretary, welcomed EDF's decision but added: "The government will now consider carefully all the component parts of this project and make its decision in the early autumn."

The construction of Hinkley Point C will eventually create an estimated 25,000 jobs, with completion scheduled for 2025. The two nuclear reactors at the plant will provide 7% of Britain's electricity, enough power for six million homes.

The last nuclear plant to open in the UK was Sizewell B in Suffolk in 1995. There are currently 15 nuclear reactors operating at seven locations in Britain.

EDF said in a statement: "Hinkley Point C is a unique asset for French and British industries as it will benefit the whole of the nuclear sectors in both countries,

and will support employment at major companies and smaller enterprises in the industry."

There was another twist to the contentious project in the run-up to the meeting when an EDF director opposed to the nuclear plant resigned before the formal vote. Gérard Magnin said the project was "very risky" in his resignation letter to EDF's chief executive.

Magnin did not attend the board meeting in Paris yesterday where EDF's remaining 17 directors voted. His resignation follows that of EDF's chief financial officer, Thomas Piquemal, earlier this year, which was also linked to concerns about the cost of Hinkley Point C. Their resignations and the narrow margin in the vote highlights the divisions created by the project.

John Sauven, the executive director of Greenpeace, called Hinkley Point "terrible value for money" for British families but said it had become "too big to fail" for politicians. EDF is 85% owned by the French government.

"Theresa May now has a chance to stop this radioactive white elephant in its tracks. She should look at the evidence and see that this deal would be a monumental disaster for taxpayers and bill payers," he said.

"Countless experts have warned that for British families this power station will be terrible value for money. This is a bitter pill to swallow for hard-up people who have been told that the government is trying to keep bills down while dealing with energy security and lowering carbon emissions."

"Today's decision doesn't prove the UK is open for business post-Brexit. It just shows the Hinkley deal became too big to fail in the eyes of British and French politicians."

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Barack Obama hugs Hillary Clinton after his address to the Democratic national convention in Philadelphia. In a dig at Donald Trump, he said: 'America's strength does not depend on any one person' Photograph: Robyn Beck/AFP/Getty

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Ford warns on jobs and prices after Brexit

Dominic Rushe and agencies

Ford has warned it is considering closing factories and raising prices in the UK and continental Europe following Britain's vote to leave the European Union.

Announcing disappointing financial results in the US last night, the motor company forecast that the referendum decision could cost the company \$1bn (£750m) over the next two years.

Ford is the largest car brand in Britain and Bob Shanks, chief financial officer, warned price rises would be necessary in Britain to offset currency fluctuations since the vote - about 60% of car parts are imported, mainly from other parts of Europe. The pound has fallen 11% against the dollar since the Brexit vote on 23 June.

Sterling's devaluation and an expected slowdown in UK car sales would cost Ford \$200m in 2016 and \$400m to \$500m a year over the next two years, said Shanks.

"We're going to have to look more at costs," he said. The company would find a way to "claw that back".

Shanks's comments are likely to stoke fears about the fate of the UK car market when Britain leaves the EU. Trade deals will have to be renegotiated with the rest of Europe, leading some analysts to speculate that car manufacturers may delay or cancel plans to expand in the UK or quit the country altogether.

Ford has two remaining manufacturing plants in the UK, in Dagenham and Bridgend. Asked if the group would shut its remaining UK manufacturing operations

after Brexit, Shanks said: "Everything is going to be on the table across Europe."

Ford's warning comes after General Motors, which owns Vauxhall, said the Brexit vote could cost it \$400m this year. The boss of Peugeot-Citroën has also hinted that car prices will have to rise.

Yesterday the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said future growth, jobs and investment were all at risk following the EU referendum result.

Almost 900,000 cars rolled off production lines in UK factories in the first six months of the year - 13% more than the same period in 2015. About 78% of the cars built in UK factories in the first six months were destined for other countries, with

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No going back on open-door refugee policy, says Merkel

Kate Connolly Berlin

Angela Merkel has delivered a staunch defence of her open-door policy towards refugees, insisting she feels no guilt over a series of violent attacks in Germany and saying she was right to allow hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees to arrive in the country last summer.

"A rejection of the humanitarian stance we took could have led to even worse consequences," the German chancellor said, adding that the assailants "wanted to undermine our sense of community, our openness and our willingness to help people in need. We firmly reject this."

Repeating her *wir schaffen das* (we can manage it) mantra, delivered last summer at the peak of the refugee crisis, Merkel

said: "I didn't say it would be easy. I said back then, and I'll say it again, that we can manage our historic task - and this is a historic test in times of globalisation - just as we've managed so much already, we can manage it... Germany is a strong country."

Within the space of a week, Germany has been rocked by an axe attack on a train, a mass shooting in Munich that left nine dead, a machete attack in which a pregnant woman was killed and a suicide



Angela Merkel's press conference had been brought forward after criticism she had failed to speak out enough on the threats facing Germany

bomb in Ansbach. Three of the attacks were carried out by refugees, and two of them - the axe attack in Würzburg in which four people were injured, and the suicide bombing - are believed to have an extremist motive.

The teenager who carried out the Munich shooting, meanwhile, was a German-Iranian who prided himself on sharing a birthday with Adolf Hitler and appeared to have targeted foreigners.

Yesterday's press conference, which was brought forward by a month so Merkel could confront critics who have accused her of being too silent on the security threats facing Germany, was dominated by the attacks, which she called "shocking, oppressive and depressing".

She said the ones carried out by those

who had "sought protection in Germany - or at least made out that they sought protection" were an "affront to the country that took them in ... to all those who have volunteered to help them, as well as to the many law-abiding refugees".

She said it was irrelevant whether those attackers "had come to Germany before or after 4 September" a reference to her historic decision on that night in 2015 to open the German border to more than 10,000 refugees who were stranded in Hungary. In the following weeks tens of thousands arrived in Germany.

While insisting that the country would remain open to those in need of asylum, the chancellor acknowledged that Islamic

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Gotta catch 'em all
How the smartphone game Pokémon Go shattered records to become a global craze

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