'France reveals details of its nuclear fuel reserves' from Le Monde (9 December 1956)

Caption: On 9 and 10 December 1956, the French daily newspaper Le Monde publishes the first official figures on the state of the national nuclear fuel reserves, summarises French investment in the nuclear sector and shows the output of national generating sites based on the figures reported by Georges Guille, Junior Minister for Relations with Parliament and for Nuclear Power in the Prime Minister's Office.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. BEUVE-MÉRY, Hubert. 09.-10.12.1956, n° 3 695; 13e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La France lève le secret sur ses ressources en combustibles nucléaires", p. 7.

URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/france_reveals_details_of_its_nuclear_fuel_reserves_from_le_monde_9_december_1956-en-0ed3b478-7fea-4247-ae8d-fdc0ed8c3f82.html

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France reveals details of its nuclear fuel reserves

Previously classified data on France's nuclear fuel reserves have recently been made public.

Before announcing details of the country's uranium and thorium reserves, Mr Georges Guille, Junior Minister in the Council Presidency, responsible for relations with Parliament and for atomic energy, said that, 'This is the first time that a uranium-producing country has taken such a step and we hope that it will contribute to improving the international cooperation which is essential in this field.'

Known quantities and projections

According to available information, uranium reserves in mainland France amount to between 50 000 and 100 000 tonnes, of which 10 000 tonnes are confirmed reserves.

In Madagascar, known reserves are to the order of 1 000 tonnes of thorianite which has a 10–20 % uranium and 60–70 % thorium content. However small these reserves may be, it seems that France will continue for some years to be one of the world's main producers of thorium and the only producer of enriched ores.

Test drillings in other Overseas Territories have not yet revealed workable deposits. They are under way in the Sahara, in French East Africa, French West Africa and in French Guiana. There have been some interesting finds, but it is still too early to make any assessment of their value. An area of 137 000 sq km has already been prospected.

The following chemical concentration plants exist or are now being built: Geugnon in the Saône-et-Loire department, which processes 50 000 tonnes of ore per year and produces 500 tonnes of concentrated uranium; the plants at Escarpière in the Vendée department and at Bessines in Haute-Vienne which will produce respectively 400 and 450 tonnes of concentrated uranium per year.

The Atomic Energy Commission's own investment in mining now stands at around 12 000 million French francs, to which must be added the capital investment made by private-sector exploration companies. About 4 500 million francs have been invested in existing and planned enrichment plants.

The cost price of chemical concentrates produced by the Atomic Energy Commission is currently to the order of 12 000 francs per kg of uranium.

3 000 tonnes of uranium by 1975

Mr Guille summed up the situation by saying that, 'We forecast that an annual production level of about 3 000 tonnes of uranium will be reached by 1975 and, for the most part, will come from reserves in mainland France.'

In addition to the investment already made, this programme will, according to preliminary estimates, require an additional investment to the order of 60 000 million francs. The investment programme might be reviewed by the European Atomic Energy Organisation and be covered by a joint European initiative.

The manpower needed to implement this plan would be roughly three times current levels, or 7 000 people by 1975, including 400 engineers and 1 000 supervisory staff.

France could provide the required manpower, equipment and raw materials, but the task will be made even easier by the joint effort of the European countries currently being envisaged.