



COLUMN

Is floating wind power the new frontier of marine renewable energies?

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Column held at FWP (Floating Wind Power) Atlantic Forum, an international event dedicated to the industrial development of floating wind power, which took place from October 2 to 4, 2017 in Saint-Nazaire and Lorient, and hosted by the Pays de la Loire and Brittany regions.

In 2016, the future investment program invested € 300 million in the floating wind energy sector as part of a global financial commitment of more than € 1 billion.

The public authorities wished to send private players a strong signal concerning the emergence of this market.

The objective of the future investments program and this financial backing is to establish industrial sectors capable of succeeding in this emerging market, both in France and abroad. The three main objectives of the future investments program are excellence, innovation and cooperation. The consortia formed in response to the call for proposals are fully capable.

We must not, however, forget that there is still much work to be done. The entire community must be made aware of State aid, a task already being carried out with project partners, to lighten the risks in the framework of studies before the final investment decision is taken, and finally projects must be completed.

The end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 were mainly given over to contracting with various project managers. I would like to reaffirm the program strategy for the four pilot wind farms we fund, namely the speed with which these farms will have to be operational. Indeed, in the field of renewable energies, and in particular marine renewable energies, competition with other technologies must encourage us all not to waste any time.

While floating offshore wind power represents a new frontier in the field of marine energies, the capacity of other renewable energy technologies should not be underestimated.

However, this technology has major advantages: the first is that floating offshore wind power is based on developments already made for fixed offshore wind turbines.

However, to say that the offshore wind turbine is simply a standard offshore wind turbine where the mast is replaced by a simple float would be a gross understatement of all the difficulties and risks that still need to be addressed; these machines, weighing several hundred tons and several hundred meters in diameter, must work in an environment as hostile as the sea can be.

The second point is obviously the competence of French players and more broadly European ones in the field of offshore energy in general. In terms of actors, industrialists in the petrol and

gas sectors are discovering that this new market is an opportunity to put their historical skills into action. SMEs are preparing themselves for a certain amount of risk-taking that reflects an entrepreneurial spirit that I would like to salute.

Making the community aware of state aid is the next big step in the field of floating wind farms and I hope, and I am confident, that we will obtain the authorisation of the European Commission in 2018.

However, the real challenge lies in the ability of pilot farms to convince the market, national as well as international, of the relevance of this technology.

That is why, beyond the objective of moving quickly, we must not forget the goals of reducing and controlling investment and operating costs.

We are on the same page with the project partners on this subject. This is not only for aiming to save public money but also and above all because deployment of this technology must be credible on the international markets.

As in any industrial venture, there is a major risk-taking for all actors, both public and private.

It is the role of the investment programme to be at your side to accompany this risk-taking because we are, I am convinced, on the verge of a new energy era. If renewable energies are to be a major element of the energy landscape, it will not be on the basis of political will alone, but because the solutions developed in this transition are economically the best. I sincerely hope that floating wind power is part of this solution!