Nuclear power in parliamentary debates in Portugal: Promise or risk?

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Context

- Nuclear energy as a classic object of controversy
- Longstanding project in Portugal
- But nuclear power plant never constructed
- Weak public debate

- Parliament leading the debate?
  - Double delegation (Callon)?
  - Deliberative turn?
- How do MPs ‘represent’ the debate?
- How is knowledge mobilised in the context of parliamentary debates?
- Do debates reflect a particular civic epistemology?

- Extended analysis of Parliamentary debates involving ‘nuclear’
On Portuguese ‘Nuclearity’

• Nuclearity –”that is, the degree to which a nation, a program, a policy, a technology, or even a material counted as ‘nuclear’“ (Hecht, 2012)

• Portugal had important uranium reserves
• Expectation of relevant uranium reserves in the then Portuguese colonies in Africa
• Created the Nuclear Energy Board – JEN (1954)
• Founding member of NATO and IAEA
• Decision to build a Nuclear Research Reactor, under the Atoms for Peace Program (1961) as as step to build a nuclear power plant
• Border with Spain as a potential locus of nuclear ‘exchanges’
Nuclear as a sociotechnical imaginary in Portugal?

‘[Socio-technical Imaginaries are] collectively imagined forms of social life and social order reflected in the design and fulfillment of nation-specific scientific and/or technological projects...Imaginaries ... at once describe attainable futures and prescribe futures that states believe ought to be attained”

(Jasanoff & Kim, 2009)
MP's Interventions on Nuclear
MP's Interventions on Nuclear
### Themes

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Parties Interventions

08/03/71 28/08/76 18/02/82 11/08/87 31/01/93 24/07/98 14/01/04 06/07/09 27/12/14

UDP
PCP
PS
PSD
PPM
VERDES
MDP/CDS
Indep.
BE
Executive
Positioning

- Pro-nuclear
- Neutral/Indefinite
- Against

Dates:
- 17/07/46
- 03/10/54
- 20/12/62
- 08/03/71
- 25/05/79
- 11/08/87
- 28/10/95
- 14/01/04
- 01/04/12
- 18/06/20
The dictatorial regime of the New State (1951-1974)
Nuclear as a socio-technical imaginary?
It is imperative that, in the dawn of the nuclear age, we must not set ourselves apart from those countries that, due to their economic wealth and their advances in Physics, began this new era.

- Very well!

The Speaker – To postpone the publication of the current diploma, which will create the first group of nuclear scientists, would be a tremendous mistake; since science does not stop, to recover our scientific underdevelopment in the future would require serious effort. Perhaps we would put ourselves in a similar situation to Japan after its first industrialization attempt.

José Sarmento, 17-02-1954, p. 482
We hope (and may God help us) that the dawn of the nuclear age is not darkened by the military applications of atomic energy. However, and if that happens, the knowledge we will acquire on that energy resource will more easily allow us to protect ourselves from its destructive effects!

José Sarmento, 17-02-1954, p. 483

The two major guidelines for the conduction of this research are the exploration of national nuclear fuels and the development of techniques to build nuclear power plants. [...] Regarding the second aspect, it was determined, in the chapter entitled “Energy” of the current Plan, that a nuclear power plant would be built in Portugal around 1975, therefore it is necessary to intensify the research that will allow us to develop these techniques.”

Post-revolutionary period
Social movements and public debate (1977-1984)
Themes

- Energy Strategy
- Power plant construction
- International - Spain
- International
- Waste management
- Green Energy
- Other

Themes represent various topics or categories, with 'Energy Strategy' being the most significant.
Framings

- Economy
- Security
- Environment
- Societal
- Scientific
- Political
- Risks/Uncertainties
On the 21st and 22nd it took place, in Caldas da Rainha, the first “Festival for Life against the Nuclear”. Promoted by a number of ecologists from Lagos, Lisbon, Coimbra and Porto, it was coordinated by the group that organizes the “Ecological Supplement” of the Caldas Gazette. Many youngsters from all over the country, and without any financial support, have joined the Festival.

The festival consisted of Exhibitions, movies, debates, colloquia and the informal sharing of ideas between participants. Afonso Cautela, António José Saraiva, Delgado Domingos, Jacinto Rodrigues and José Carlos Marques, as well as members of the Commission against Pollution of Alviela and the Inhabitants' Committee of Ferrel also participated. Most of the participants believed that “it’s better to be active today than radioactive tomorrow”.

Alberto Andrade (Socialist Party), 24-01-1978, p. 1112
One of the initiatives that should be highlighted, and that took over a year and a half to prepare, is the Second National Encounter of Energy Policy, taking place on the 25th and 26th of March at the National Laboratory of Civil Engineering. There were numerous interventions on specific themes, and the discussion and analysis of the issues at stake benefited from the participation of members of workers’ commissions as well as scientists, engineers, economists, other technicians and workers, citizens that live in Peniche-Ferrel, ecologists and University students. We should also mention the unofficial participation of technicians and other workers of EDP; we hope that they won’t suffer any retaliation due to their courage and willingness to publicly express their opinions on a topic that clearly transcends the internal affairs of their corporation.

Sousa Marques (Communist Party), 26-05-1977, p. 3824
Following the intervention of the MPs, one could suppose that the entire opposition is against the nuclear option. According to my knowledge, only the ASDI, UEDS and UDP were against the development of a nuclear power plant. It’s quite odd, indeed, that all the questions, some of them reasonable, were posed by those who have frequently stated that, if the nuclear reactors are Soviet and serve the “working class” are good, whereas if they serve the “bourgeoisie”, and are American, are bad. Some of the questions, however, are quite striking, and they remind us of the silence of the Socialist Party, since all the supposedly leftist press announced, some days before the visit of President Miterrand to Portugal, that the selling of French nuclear stations was on the negotiation agenda. No one from the Socialist party has provided any clarifications, and we don’t know if the Socialist Party is in favor of the US made Westinghouse nuclear stations or prefers the Westinghouse stations built in France, under American license, by FRAIMATOM.

Luís Coimbra (Popular Monarchist Party), 18-03-1982, p. 2810
International Follow-Up (1985-1999)
Positioning

- Pro-nuclear
- Neutral/Indefinite
- Against
International Follow-up (1985-1999)

The incidents of Three Mile Island, in the US, in 1979, and, more recently in Chernobyl, Soviet Union, have demonstrated that the danger is identical, regardless of its ends.

Raul de Brito (Socialist Party), 13-05-1986, p- 2519

Issues of responsibility, ethics and transparency oblige us to question the legitimacy of the Spanish State to impose upon Portugal (that has rejected nuclear energy) this option; these values also demand us to be vigilant regarding what is going on in the Iberian Peninsula; they require us to overcome the status of mere observers of what is going on in Spain, unable to defend our interests and ignoring their programs, including nuclear energy. The news coming from Spain oblige us to be mindful and responsible in accompanying these dossiers, fostering a cautious attitude towards the location of Spanish nuclear power plants, whether near international rivers, such as Tejo, or in Almaraz, close to our borders.

Isabel Castro (Green Party), 29-04-1998, 2136
Nuclear as Green Energy (2000- )
Framings

- Economy
- Security
- Environment
- Societal
- Scientific
- Political
- Risks/Uncertainties
The [European] Commissioner [Loyola de Palacios] argues that nuclear energy is synonymous with “clean” energy. In fact, there is no emission of carbon dioxide or of other gases that contribute towards the greenhouse effect – that is true! – however, we cannot consider nuclear energy as “clean”. Nuclear power stations have been riddled with accidents, radioactive leaks and even explosions.

Salvador Messano Cardoso (Social Democrats), 08-05-2002, p. 249

Regarding the [intervention of] MP Francisco Madeira Lopes, I would like to state that, actually, concerning this debate on nuclear energy, one of the lies that has been often propagated concerns the “cleanliness” of the production of energy. In fact, this is one of the recently used arguments, ignoring, or attempting to conceal from the public the fact that nuclear energy is far from being a clean energy. It does not only contribute to the emission of CO2 during the extraction of uranium but also produces residues that stay radioactive for tens of thousands of years. Therefore, this argument is actually deceiving, poisoning the public opinion.

Alda Macedo (Left Block), 26-04-2006, p. 5376
On Expertise

I would like to apologize beforehand because the questions I will pose are below the level of knowledge you displayed in your intervention; I do not pose them as a technician but as someone who has to take political responsibilities and to make an effort to be able to develop an informed decision on this matter.

Lopes Cardoso (Leftist Union for the Socialist Democracy), 26-04-1984, p. 4152

We are not only technicians but also colleagues of the same profession.

Nuno Abecasis (Democratic and Social Centre), 26-05-1977, p. 3827
On sources

That the monograph studies be elaborated equitably and made available publicly in both sides of the border, as well as the impact studies to develop in the field, and also that conclusions be produced and made available on the eventuality of a “very serious accident” not only from the perspective of the Rasmussem report, but also from the perspective of the report of the Koln Institute for Reactors Security and of the Group of Scientists for Information on Nuclear Energy from the University of Provence, since both reports predict that in the case of a “very serious accident” the deathly area may extend for over 100 km in the direction of the wind.
Discussion

• An imaginary of a Nuclear Portugal was being constructed by the technocracy, with a limited framing

• The opening of public contestation also opened up the themes in debate

• The debates reflect different framings of the ‘political’

• Interventions have been increasingly against the nuclear
  – Or revealing increasingly less support...
  – The main political parties have changed positions regarding the nuclear

• Despite the absence of a nuclear power plant, the nuclear remains present, namely through international events

• The ressurgence of the nuclear as ‘green energy’ has been contested

• Parliament has not enacted a ‘deliberative turn’
  – MPs as experts
  – International expertise as a source of authority