

**European Commission**

Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, Tuesday 23 March 2021

Dear Ms Kadri Simson,
European Commissioner for Energy,

On behalf of the Members of the European Parliament co-signatories of this letter, we would like to address you the following concerns, hoping that it is of your interest.

NO to the MAT

Red Eléctrica de España (REE), Spain's electricity company, and this country's main manager of the electricity transmission system, has projected a Very High Voltage (MAT in its Catalan acronym) line: 400kv of only 17 km in the province of Girona, in the northeast of Catalonia.

It is an infrastructure that aims to link the existing MAT (France–Spain interconnection, through the Catalan towns of Vic and Sentmenat), from Santa Coloma de Farners to a substation in Riudarenes. REE sees it as the only possible alternative.

The initial objective was to supply enough electricity to the southern part of this region, as well as to the high-speed railway (AVE in its Spanish acronym) that links Barcelona and France through Girona.

An outdated project

However, this project was conceived 25 years ago, based on an economic growth forecasted at the end of the 20th century. Such a forecast has by no means been fulfilled. The AVE train is already working and the forecasts of consumption and energy supply in our days have nothing to do with the situation of the last years of the 1990s, when Spain was experiencing economic growth.

Today, the European Union bases the future of its energy system on renewable energy, which also entails a much more efficient use of energy as a whole. We are in the times of the EU's Green Deal, of the green and digital twin transitions, moving towards decarbonisation and the full elimination of CO² by the year 2050. Additionally, France's nuclear power plants, the source of the electricity that goes through the MAT, have expiration dates.

Knowing that it is necessary to install a total of 6,000MWp of photovoltaic and 6,000MWp of wind power before 2030 in Catalonia, can REE technically justify that the said infrastructure is the most suitable for the renewable energy supply proposed in this territory?

MAT: no sufficient technical information, and an ecological impact

The MAT's branch project is hiding under an incomprehensible lack of transparency. The local and regional authorities (Girona's City Council and Provincial Council) have requested the technical data that justifies the need for this very high voltage power line. As of now, they have not obtained sufficient technical information from REE or from the Spanish government.

The Environmental Impact Assessment is insufficient and out of date. It does not present the basic information necessary in its substantial impact on endangered species. It does therefore not fall in line with European laws. Some of the endangered species are the European pond turtle (*Emys orbicularis*) or the European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), among many others.

The MAT runs 200m near a Natura 2000 area and the subsequent distribution will cross this protected area. The project is so outdated that the administrative documentation has already expired. Yet it is still envisioned.

European interconnection certificate

The Riudarenes 400kV branch project would source the Riudarenes's substation, also through an inlet and outlet of the 400 kV Vic–Bescanó line, according to the current schedule of the Spanish government set between 2015 and 2020. This line would unfold itself into two subsequent lines: Vic–Riudarenes, and Riudarenes–Bescanó. This circumstance, in accordance with section (g) of Chapter 3.3 of Operation Procedure 13.1 (*apartado g del capítulo 3.3 del Procedimiento de Operación 13.1*), drawn up by REE and approved by MINETUR, affects the qualification of these lines. This fact, in turn, affects them to be “international connection lines” and become, simply, “connection lines”. As a reminder, Europe granted a €350 million for this European interconnection line in Girona and the reinforcement of the AVE's railway.

There are alternatives

Since 2005, the electrical power available in the Girona province has increased, while energy demand has decreased.

The Government of Catalonia (the Generalitat), which initially agreed onto this project, has not been considering it necessary for years. The Generalitat has even commissioned and published a report from the College of Engineers of Catalonia (*Col·legi d'Enginyers de Catalunya*) that proposes up to six viable alternatives to this project, with their technical justification.

The report shows that the Santa Coloma de Farners – Riudarenes branch is not mandatory, and offers more feasible alternatives, with less impact for the electricity supply of the Riudarenes's substation.

Why have these alternatives not been studied in detail?

Contrary to the political agreement

All the affected municipalities have approved motions requesting the repeal of this MAT project, as well as the rest of the town councils of La Selva, the local administration (*Consell comarcal de La Selva*), the provincial authority (*Diputació de Girona*), and even the Catalan Parliament. Even Spain's Congress of Deputies, the Spanish low chamber of parliament, has urged the Spanish government to repeal the said project and to study viable alternatives in the territory (through the *Proposición no de Ley*, PNL 5/10/2016). We ask ourselves why is the Spanish government still going ahead with this project?



For all of the above, we the signatories ask the European Commission to request the General Directorate of Energy of the Government of Spain (*Dirección General de Energía del Gobierno de España*) the answers to the questions we have raised so far, as well as the following:

-) Can REE technically justify that the said infrastructure is the most suitable for the renewable energy supply proposed in this territory?
-) Can REE study in detail the alternatives presented by the *Generalitat*?
-) Considering the answers to the two previous questions, is the Spanish government considering its definitive repeal? Or in any other case, does he considers opting for the least environmentally and territorially damaging option, as stated in the PNL (Proposition not of law) approved in the Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment Committee of the *Congreso de los Diputados*?

We thank you in advance for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

MEP Jordi Solé (Greens/EFA)
MEP Diana Riba (Greens/EFA)
MEP Ernest Urtasun (Greens/EFA)
MEP Carles Puigdemont (NI)
MEP Antoni Comín (NI)
MEP Clara Ponsatí (NI)
MEP Javi López (S&D)