

French energy firm guilty of spying on Greenpeace

By Henry Samuel in Paris

French state energy giant EDF, which owns British Energy, the main U.K. nuclear power operator, was found guilty on Thursday of spying on the environmental group Greenpeace. Two of its former employees were jailed.

EDF was fined €1.5 million (£1.3 million) for hiring a private investigation agency run by a former member of the French secret services to hack the computers of Yannick Jadot, the head of campaigns for Greenpeace France, in 2006.

The case has reawakened painful memories in a country whose secret services were behind the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior, Greenpeace's flagship, 26 years ago.

When EDF was first charged with spying in 2009, Jean-Louis Borloo, France's environment minister, said, "If by extraordinary chance this is true, what type of country are we living in?"

Pascal Durieux, EDF's head of nuclear production security in 2006, was given a three-year sentence with two years suspended, and a €10,000 fine for ordering the espionage. The court in Nanterre, near Paris, also sentenced Pierre-Paul Francois, his No. 2 in 2006, to three years, with 30 months suspended.

The judge found Thierry Lorho, the head of Kargus Consultants, a firm employed by EDF, guilty of hacking into Greenpeace's computers, handing him a three-year jail term, two suspended, and a €4,000 fine.

EDF, a sponsor of the London Olympics, was charged with complicity in concealing stolen documents and complicity to intrude on a computer network. EDF was ordered to pay €500,000 damages to Greenpeace.

EDF, which runs France's network of 58 nuclear reactors, has often been the target of Greenpeace's campaigns.

The environmental group had speculated that the spying incident could be related to its efforts to block EDF's construction of a controversial pressurised reactor in Flamanville on France's north coast.

Construction costs have risen from €3billion to €6billion, and four-year delays mean it will not be completed until 2016.

During the trial, EDF insisted it had not sanctioned the hacking, saying it had asked Kargus to simply "monitor" Greenpeace's activities, particular regarding Flamanville, but that the agency had "overstepped" the terms of the contract.

Kargus was also ordered to find out about Greenpeace France's intentions and its plan to block new nuclear plants in the U.K.

The agency hacked Jadot's computer, taking 1,400 documents. Investigators traced the data theft to Alain Quiros, who received a two-year prison sentence, with 18 months suspended.

"This was a moral failure by a major company that has touted itself as ethical," Jadot said after the ruling, which came amid a heated debate in France over the future of the country's huge network of electricity-generating nuclear power plants, just six months before presidential elections.

"Today's verdict confirms that, in France, the atomic industry is associated with lies, dodgy secret agents and illegality," said Adelaide Colin for Greenpeace.

Alexis Gublin, EDF's lawyer, said he would first read "the exact terms of this decision" before deciding whether to appeal against the verdict.

Vincent de Rivaz, EDF chief executive, said the firm's plans to build four reactors in Britain is unaffected.