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Commission's Euratom proposals evoke mixed reactions

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The Research Council reached a broad agreement on the shape of the Euratom programme on 30 October, but failed to reach a consensus regarding the programme budget or the future direction of fission research.



Ministers stressed their commitment to fusion research to ensure Europe's long term long term energy needs are met, emphasising their preference for this research to be conducted within the framework of the ITER project. Delegates agreed that the production of energy from nuclear fusion should be possible within 20 to 30 years. Some ministers proposed that industry should play a greater role in the project and that the scope of the research should be widened to examine high-resistance materials which could be used in the construction of a new reactor.

The Council endorsed France's bid to construct the ITER reactor at the research site in Cadarache, France, and adopted it as the European proposal to compete against other sites in Japan and Canada.

In the area of nuclear fission research, the Council agreed on the importance of safety and radioprotection. Less amenable was the Council's response to the Commission proposal to fund the development of concepts for new reactor types which would produce less waste. The Belgian Presidency proposed limiting such funding to the exploration of the potential of such concepts.

Regarding the budget for the Euratom programme during the Sixth Framework programme (FP6), some ministers proposed an increase in the funding of fusion research, but no consensus was reached.

In the wider context of FP6, ministers agreed to the Commission proposal that the programme implementation should be overseen by a single programme committee in which the Member States are represented, along with a set of sub-committees specialising in specific domains. Such an arrangement is intended to ensure the transparency of Commission decisions.

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