

Ms. N. FONTAINE, President of the European Parliament,
Mr. T. ÖSTROS, President of the Council of Ministers for Research of the European Union,
Mr. Ph. BUSQUIN, Member of the European Commission for Science, Research and Development,
Mr. C. WESTENDORP Y CABEZA, Chairman of the ITRE Committee and Members of the ITRE Committee,
Mr. T. WYNN, Chairman of the Committee on Budgets, European Parliament,
The Members of the European Parliament,
Mr. G. FRERICHS, President of the European Economic and Social Committee,
Scientific Attachés to the Permanent Representations,

April 30, 2001

Dear President, Commissioner, Chairman,
Member of the European Parliament, Scientific Attaché,

We are junior and senior scientists and engineers working for the European Fusion Programme. With this letter we express our dismay at the consequences of the proposed important reduction in the budget for Fusion Research in the 6th Framework Programme. We are deeply concerned that this reduction sends the wrong signal at a crucial moment for a decision on ITER*. A more supportive signal from the Commission and from European decision-makers is required.

Growing evidence for climate changes world-wide, mainly caused by burning of fossil fuels, convinces us that there should be no delay in finding solutions to a global problem of which nobody knows the precise consequences. Moreover, fusion has the potential to help Europe achieve the necessary energy independence outlined in the Commission Green Paper "Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply" [COM(2000) 769 final]. We therefore see a dedicated effort for the timely realisation of fusion energy as our obligation to Europe and the World as part of a broad effort to help preserve the environment and to enable the rising world population to benefit from a range of clean energy sources. Fusion has a major role to play in this endeavour as a safe, environmentally benign and practically inexhaustible electric energy source.

We were encouraged by the discussions in the Informal Meeting of the European Research Council on the 19th of January 2001, underlining the necessity for beginning the construction of ITER during FP6, in Europe or elsewhere. In particular, in the paper [Document SEC(2001)385-5.03.2001] presented by Commissioner Busquin at the above mentioned meeting, the Commissioner had noted that a budget of 850 million Euro was needed for the option which included the start of the ITER project during FP6. However, to our great surprise, the recent proposal from the Commission reduces the fusion budget from the 850 million Euro deemed necessary by the Commissioner to 700 million Euro, while maintaining a provision for ITER. Such a reduction is at odds with the intentions of the European Research Council.

The construction of ITER is a necessary Next Step towards the realisation of the demonstration reactor (DEMO). Of equal importance is to guarantee the necessary European coordination within the framework of the European Research Area, a vital element for an activity as complex as fusion energy research, by supporting the existing European research activities needed for complementary physics and technology studies related to ITER and for the training of young scientists. Until now, the European Fusion Programme has been an example of highly successful European collaboration and integration, with the Commission playing the roles of catalyst and coordinator with vision. This has given Europe world leadership in Fusion Research. The continuing success of the scientific exploitation of JET (Joint European Torus) and of the ITER design activities is an additional proof that the European Research Area already exists in fusion.

* International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor

We are convinced that the progress made in Fusion Research in the last few years has provided the knowledge necessary to realise the Next Step. We hope and we have indications that, in addition to the Japanese and Russian resolve to go forward with ITER integrated in their national programmes, we will benefit from a continuing US scientific input. The European Fusion Programme is currently reorganising to carry out the ITER project. The additional constraints resulting from a reduction in the budget would seriously jeopardise the current plans to combine the efforts of the Associations in preparation for the Next Step. Part of these efforts are the collaborative experiments on JET in progress since 2000, with a European team involving all Associations.

In conclusion, it is our firm hope that the initially estimated budget of 850 million Euro - which is the present budget corrected for inflation - will be adopted. Sufficient funding for a coordinated European involvement in ITER linked with European plasma physics and engineering research is the route for the future. We put our trust in you to provide Fusion Research and Development with the necessary resources to maintain the coherence and leadership of the European Fusion Programme in a domain of such importance for the future.

Please find enclosed a list of more than 1450 signatures from staff of Fusion Institutions throughout Europe.

Sincerely yours,

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