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Ikeda tapped as head of ITER organization

(Kyodo) _ Kaname Ikeda, a former Science and Technology Agency official, was tapped Monday to be the chief of an international project to build a nuclear fusion reactor in France, science ministry officials said.

The decision on the appointment of Ikeda, 59, currently Japanese Ambassador to Croatia, was made at a meeting in Vienna of deputy ministerial officials from the European Union and five participating countries -- Japan, China, Russia, South Korea and the United States, according to the officials.

An agreement will be formalized by the end of this year for the yet-to-be-established International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor project organization, and Ikeda is slated to assume the head of the organization when it is launched, the officials said.

In return of building the world's first nuclear fusion reactor in Cadarache, southern France, the European Union agreed to support a candidate proposed by Japan, which had fiercely competed with France to be the host of the project, the Japanese officials said. The four other nations also backed the Japanese candidate, they said.

Ikeda joined the then Science and Technology Agency of the Japanese government in 1968 and served as head of the research and development bureau and deputy vice minister, as well as director of the now-defunct National Space Development Agency of Japan.

He has been Japanese Ambassador to Croatia since April 2003.

An official at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology said he was recommended for the post because "he is versed in science and technology policies and has also been involved in major international projects."

Japan will also host a research center for ITER in Rokkasho in Aomori Prefecture in northern Japan.

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