

EU stands firm in new Japan talks on nuclear deal



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The EU renewed a pledge to strike an accord with Japan this month in a dispute over the location of a revolutionary nuclear project, as new talks on the standoff were held in Brussels.

The European Union's executive arm said the new talks with deputy science minister Tetsuhisa Shirakawa were a "good sign" for an accord on the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER).

"I think its a good sign that negotiations are continuing," said Antonia Mochan, spokeswoman for EU science and research commissioner Janez Potocnik, who is leading the negotiations with Japan for the EU.

Earlier this week Japan's main business lobby and ruling coalition lawmakers called on Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to stand firm on hosting the multibillion-dollar project that would try to emulate the sun's nuclear fusion.

But local media have reported that Japan is ready to give up on bringing ITER to the northern village of Rokkasho-mura and is trying to ensure it gets as much as possible for dropping its bid.

EU heavyweight state France has already said it is virtually certain to be the host of ITER in the southeastern town of Cadarache.

The United States and South Korea support Japan's bid for ITER, while China and Russia back the European Union, which seeks to locate the project in Cadarache.

The EU spokeswoman declined to comment on the Japanese press reports. "There are discussions in the Japanese press as in the European press," she told reporters.

"But we are focussed on the concrete negotiations underway. It is in these discussions that will we will make progress. We are sticking to our target date of the end of June for an agreement.

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