

The Commission estimates that the EU can advance alone to establish the thermonuclear reactor experimental ITER in Cadarache. France promises to double its contribution to 914 million euro.

The European Union (EU) could go it alone in the construction of the future experimental thermonuclear reactor ITER, if Brussels does not manage to convince Japan and the United States, which takes part in this international project, that the best site for construction is in the south of France at Cadarache, and not at Rokkasho-Mura, in the north of the Japanese archipelago. The European Commission thus plans to do without the contributions from these two "partners". It hopes however to maintain a reduced international consortium with the presence of Russia, of China and perhaps even Korea.

In a letter addressed to the Minister for the Science of the Netherlands (which chairs European Union), the EU Commission Chief of Research, Philippe Busquin, explains he has asked his services to examine the financial implications if the EU and its partners should launch construction of ITER without the ensemble of the current partners. According to Philippe Busquin, "even this assumption, on which with regret the (international) union does not engage, it seems that the missing financial contributions could be covered without additional cost for the community budget".

Financial arrangement. The new financial arrangement, aiming at covering the 4.6 billion euro for the construction of ITER over ten years, rests in good part on France. In a letter addressed to the Commission on September 11, François d'Aubert, French Minister for Research, promises to double the French contribution if the EU decided to go ahead without Japan and the United States. "France, which assumed 457 million euro in the preliminary draft with six partners, is ready to finance up to 20% of the cost of construction, that is to say 914 million euros", explained the Minister. The Commission estimates moreover that 20% in savings are possible thanks to the modification of certain technological choices. The EU would take part for 40%, China and Russia for 10% each and the 10% remaining could come other partners like Brazil or Canada, even of voluntary contributions other Member States of the EU.

The new arrangement must be studied by the Ministers of the twenty-five members of the Council of the European Union (COMPETITIVENESS – Internal market, Industry and Research) at their next meeting which will be held Friday (September 24). But the Commission and France will have to convince some States that are very vigilant not to pay a cent more for this project. Germany and also the Netherlands and Great Britain, principal contributors to the budget of the EU will ask for assurance of the viability of this arrangement.