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## France to Host Nuclear Fusion Project - EU Source

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By Yves Clarisse

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - France will host a major global nuclear fusion project after Japan gave up its bid to host the \$12 billion International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) in return for compensation, an EU source said on Monday.

The European Union and five other partners want to build ITER, the world's first futuristic nuclear reactor that would generate energy through nuclear fusion, much like the sun.

But the six members of the ITER project have been split over where to locate the reactor with Washington previously backing Tokyo in what was seen as a payback for French opposition to the Iraq war.

Negotiators from ITER -- the EU, United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia and China -- are meeting from Monday until Wednesday in Vienna, headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Authority to hammer out a deal.

"The agreement foresees Iter in Cadarache," the source said, referring to the French site north of Marseille. "They are preparing an agreement under which the Japanese would receive something."

The EU has been ratcheting up diplomatic pressure to host ITER and in September asked the European Commission, its executive arm, to assess the cost of going ahead even if the United States did not participate.

EU ministers had been expected to decide on the project, which has big industrial and technological spin-off benefits, on Nov. 25-26.

A Commission spokesman declined to confirm that a deal had been struck but said the EU executive was hopeful.

"We are optimistic," spokesman Fabio Fabbi said. "We hope to have a positive result with ITER in Cadarache."

While the EU, backed by China and Russia, wanted ITER to be built in Cadarache, the United States along with South Korea had said they preferred Rokkasho, a remote fishing village in northern Japan.

Non-EU countries such as Brazil and Switzerland had also expressed interest in joining the project on the EU side.

France's Ministry for Research refused to comment on the news and said negotiations were continuing.

"One has to remain extremely cautious," a source close to Research Minister Francois d'Aubert said. "Negotiations are still ongoing and for the moment, they have not been concluded."

In a bid to end the stalemate, France proposed doubling its contribution for the 4.77 billion euros needed to build the reactor in Cadarache over 10 years. Paris is ready to pay 914 million euros or 20 percent of the costs.

The EU will pay 40 percent of the costs, while China and Russia will give a 10 percent contribution. The remaining 20 percent will come from other participating parties.

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