



Japan sticks to six-party framework for nuclear fusion project

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AFP/File Photo

TOKYO, (AFP) - Japan is sticking to a six-party framework to build the world's first prototype nuclear fusion reactor even if the European Union ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) opts to push ahead with its own project, a Japanese official said.

"Our basic stance is that the six parties should undertake the project jointly," the official in charge of nuclear fusion research said.

China, Russia, South Korea ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) and the United States as well as the EU and Japan make up the group.

The official, who asked to remain anonymous, said Tokyo was aware of reports that the EU was considering going ahead with the experiment on its own but had no confirmation about European intentions.

The EU and Japan are competing to host the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), aimed to be a test-bed for what is being billed as a clean, safe, inexhaustible energy source of the future.

The European bloc wants to build the reactor in the southern French town of Cadarache, near Marseille, and has reportedly won support from China and Russia.

South Korea and the United States appear to prefer the Japanese site, in the northern village of Rokkasho-mura.

In Brussels, diplomatic sources said Thursday that The Netherlands, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, was seeking to settle the disagreement over the location of the reactor by the end of November.

A European Union source confirmed in Brussels on Wednesday that the chief EU negotiator Philippe Busquin, who until recently was the commissioner for research, had written a letter to the EU presidency suggesting that the grouping should start to study the possibility of launching its own project.

EU allies such as China and Russia could join the European project, and other interested countries such as Canada and India would also be welcome, the source said.

However a spokesman for Louis Michel, who is standing in for Busquin as commissioner for research during the final period of the current EU Commission, said on Thursday that the EU still had hopes of reaching a deal with the other partners, and notably Japan.

"We think there is still a possibility of reaching an agreement with the five other partners," said spokesman Fabio Fabbi in Brussels.

EU ministers involved in issues of competitiveness, including research, are due to discuss the issue in Brussels on Friday.

The choice of the site must be made by consensus, and not by a simple majority, partly because all parties will be required to fund the reactor which will cost roughly five billion dollars to build and another five billion to run over 20 years.

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