

Nuclear talks in Austria



International representatives will meet in Vienna on Saturday to discuss a controversial nuclear fusion plan.

The technical meeting of experts is intended to pave the way for a ministerial decision on the location of ITER (the international thermonuclear energy reactor).

France and Japan are currently the two main contenders for the project, with the USA firmly opposed to Paris's bid.

Japan in January agreed with a Russian suggestion that the two could share the project if governments fail to reach a decision.

But Paris is calling instead for the EU to fund the site in France on its own unless it wins the international competition.

France beat off competition from Spain to go ahead as the EU's candidate, but the USA is strongly opposed to its bid and instead supports Japan.

Supporters of nuclear fusion say it provides an attractive long-term energy option, because the basic materials needed for its generation are in plentiful supply, and fusion reactors would not produce fissile materials that could be used in nuclear weapons.

But opponents point out that decades of research into fusion have failed to produce results, and call instead for investment in renewable energy sources.

The EU, USA, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and China are expected to try for a final decision on ITER in March, though this has already been postponed from February.

This final meeting would probably take place in Washington.

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