



Europe presses plan for fusion reactor

By James Kanter International Herald Tribune

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PARIS European leaders agreed to accelerate plans to build the world's first nuclear fusion reactor in France - even if it means that the project goes ahead in the absence of an agreement with Japan on where the reactor should be located.

The ambitious plans aim to meet demands for power in the 21st century, while at the same time promoting clean and limitless supplies of energy that could end reliance on polluting fossil fuels.

France and Japan have been dueling over where to locate the prestigious project, known as the ITER, or International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, delaying go-ahead for the €10 billion, or \$13 billion, project.

Speaking Wednesday, President Jacques Chirac of France underlined the importance of ITER and called for work to begin in "as short a time as possible."

Chirac was among 25 European Union leaders in Brussels for a summit meeting that was dominated by economic issues, including changing the way the euro zone holds steady the value of its single currency.

The summit meeting also was a forum for Chirac to emphasize the need to imbue Europe with new industrial vision.

Chirac said the ITER project, once under way, could form part of a long line of European engineering successes that had, in the past, benefited from French backing, and that included the Airbus range of passenger aircraft, the Ariane space rocket program, and the new Galileo satellite project.

Visionary industrial projects were "Europe's strength in the past" and "must make up Europe's strengths tomorrow," Chirac said, touting a new agency for industrial development that he launched in France in January as a model for other countries to follow.

The ITER project involves six international partners - the United States, Japan, South Korea, China, Russia and the EU. The United States and South Korea have supported Japan's offer to build ITER in Rokkasho-mura, a Japanese fishing village, while the EU, China and Russia have backed Cadarache, a town in southern France.

The dispute is simmering, as Japanese officials say they still want to be the host of the fusion reactor.

"We have been conducting technical discussions at the working level, and we believe the Japanese proposal about the project is superior to the EU proposal," Takahiro Hayashi, the deputy director of Japan's Office of Fusion Energy, told Agence France-Presse this month.

European leaders on Wednesday signaled their impatience over delays to the project and pledged, in a statement, to start building ITER on the European site by the end of 2005.

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