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## Fight Over ITER Continues

In what has become a fierce battle of wills between Europe and Japan, the European Union laid out its bid this week to have the \$6 billion International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) built on European soil.

The fusion reactor, which aims to produce virtually limitless power by fusing hydrogen nuclei, is ready to begin construction. But ITER's six international partners have disagreed for nearly a year on whether it should be built at the E.U. site at Cadarache in southern France or at Rokkasho in the north of Japan's main island. The European Commission, the E.U.'s executive body, said on 16 November that it wanted to form a "genuine partnership" with Japan. If the reactor is sited at Cadarache, the 25 commissioners said, "Japan could receive favorable conditions to reflect its special contribution."

The favors could include a leading role in ITER's management and construction contracts worth more than Japan's expected financial contribution, which the E.U. hopes will be 18% of ITER's cost. As an added incentive, Japan could also host a materials testing facility needed for the commercial reactors that could come after ITER and receive greater support for its own planned JT60 fusion reactor.

The E.U.'s offer was first spelled out to Japan's delegation at a meeting of ITER partners in Vienna on 9 November. Japan's chief negotiator, Satoru Ohtake, says that his country also offered "quite generous concessions" to the E.U. if Japan wins the reactor. In contrast, he says, the E.U.'s proposal "is less generous to the nonhost."

An E.U. source says that the commission would like Japan to respond to its offer before the end of the year. If Japan misses that deadline, "the E.U. reserves the right to go ahead with fewer partners, although all will be invited to join," the source says.

--DANIEL CLERY

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