

EU in push for support on nuclear fusion reactor

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EU ministers have agreed to try to win broad international support for a plan to build a futuristic nuclear reactor in France, even though several EU countries appeared ready to do it without the United States.

The European Union and five other partners want to build the first International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor to obtain power through nuclear fusion, a clean energy source.

But views are split on where the ITER reactor, estimated to cost around \$10 billion over 30 years, should be based.

While the EU, backed by China and Russia, wants ITER to be built in the French city of Cadarache, the United States along with South Korea have said they prefer Rokkasho, in Japan.

"The decision is to launch a major diplomatic effort to have all the six countries join the project," a spokesman for the Dutch presidency of the EU told Reuters yesterday.

Diplomats said the US resistance seemed to be political rather than based on scientific grounds, and that the upcoming US presidential elections complicated the discussion.

Meanwhile, non-EU countries such as Brazil and Switzerland have expressed interest in joining the project on the EU side.

EU ministers attending talks in Brussels asked the European Commission to assess the financial implications of all possible scenarios for ITER, including one without the United States.

The ministers are expected to take a decision on November 25 on which path to take on ITER.

What was clear, diplomats said, is that the EU will fight for the reactor to be built in its own territory.

"All member states are in agreement on this subject," French research minister Francois d'Aubert told reporters. He added that he expected EU ministers to give the green light to the project at the end of November, with or without Washington.

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

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

EU diplomats said countries such as Italy and Spain were inclined to support the French position. But Germany and the Netherlands, the current EU president, were against.

Reuters