

EU gives Japan until June to reach deal on nuclear project



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BRUSSELS (AFP) - The European Union ([news - web sites](#)) gave Japan until June to reach a deal about who will host a revolutionary nuclear reactor, saying that otherwise it could press ahead with the project without Tokyo's support.



[AFP/File Photo](#)

Japan and France are vying to host the multi-billion dollar International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), one of the most exciting ventures in international science.

But talks among the six parties involved are deadlocked: the United States and South Korea ([news - web sites](#)) support Japan's offer to build ITER in Rokkasho-mura, a northern Japanese village near the Pacific Ocean, while the EU, China and Russia back France's bid for it to be based in Cadarache, southern France.

Research Minister Francois Biltgen of Luxembourg, which holds the rotating EU presidency through June, warned Monday that an agreement had to be reached before July.

According to the current plans "work on ITER should begin by the end of this year," Biltgen said at a meeting of European science ministers. "That means a decision should be taken under the Luxembourg presidency."

EU commissioner for science and research Janez Potocnik issued the latest barely-disguised warning to Japan the bloc could proceed with the project without Tokyo if no deal is reached.

"While I intend to pursue a six-party agreement until the last possible moment, I am at the same time determined that the solution including the highest possible number of parties should be found soon, that is in due time to allow construction to start before the end of this year," he said.

He added that he continued to believe that the best solution is to build ITER with the six international parties, "not least as a model for future international joint endeavors," he said.

"And I still hope to receive a clear signal from Japan indicating their genuine willingness to pursue negotiations regarding the EU offer on a political level."

Potocnik said last week that the EU was pressing Japan to consider a "high political level" compromise to resolve the standoff, but Japan said it was too early to seek such a compromise while technical discussions were still taking place.

ITER, which would emulate the sun's nuclear fusion, was not expected to generate inexhaustible supplies of electricity before 2050.

The project was expected to cost 10 billion euros (13 billion dollars) over the next 30 years, including 4.7 billion euros for the reactor.

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