

## France clings to fusion dreams

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Paris is demanding that Europe go ahead with plans to build a nuclear fusion plant, even if it misses out on international funding.

Cadarache in the south of France is currently Europe's candidate to host the International Thermonuclear Energy Reactor, known as ITER, but has met with stiff competition from Japan.

French prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin announced on Monday that the EU should be prepared to go it alone.

"We have to have ITER, even if we do it ourselves", Raffarin told journalists, adding that "This is the energy of the future, the wealth of the 21st century."

With the USA throwing its support behind Japan – a move which many believe to be a backlash for France's opposition to the war in Iraq – Paris's chance of winning ITER seem to be dwindling.

Russia and China appeared to support France's bid before Christmas, but Japan has launched a diplomatic offensive to win them over before a decision is taken next month.

And having already failed to win the support of South Korea, France seems resigned to making plans on its own.

"The Europeans could do it – possibly with Canada", said Raffarin.

"We won't let go of this – we're in a negotiation phase and we're determined."

The commission on Tuesday said that building ITER alone was "scientifically and technically feasible" but cautioned that the  $\times 10$  billion needed was "a significant amount of money".

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.

A spokesman for environmental group Greenpeace called it "a boffin's dream," adding, "ITER has been a glint in scientists' eyes for 50 years – it won't deliver anything for another 50 at least".

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