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Sustainable and safer energy supply: Commission to invest Euro 1.230 billion in European nuclear research

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Sustainable and safer energy supply: Commission to invest Euro 1.230 billion in European nuclear research

EU nuclear research will play a key role in ensuring diversified energy sources are available in Europe. The just adopted Euratom Research Framework Programme sets new guidelines for European nuclear research for the 2002-2006 period. With a total budget of € 1.230 billion, the programme addresses all key issues to promote sustainable nuclear power in Europe. EU Research Commissioner Philippe Busquin said: "Safe and clean nuclear energy is a priority for sustainable development: it can greatly contribute to meeting Kyoto Treaty requirements. And there is a clear need for EU action to pool together know-how and resources in state-of-the-art nuclear research at European level". The programme sets the conditions for creating a true European Research Area in the nuclear sector and paves the way for more efficient co-ordination of existing research activities in Member States. Most of the budget (€ 750 million) will fund nuclear fusion research. The programme should create conditions to launch the construction of the large ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) facility within the next few years. ITER partners include the European Union, Japan, Russia and Canada. Nuclear fission programme will focus on the management and disposal of radioactive waste and foster close research co-operation between EU national waste management agencies.

"Kyoto provisions for CO₂ reduction impose strict requirements to the EU. As the US decided not to ratify the Kyoto Treaty, the burden for Europe becomes even heavier," added Commissioner Busquin. "The debate on nuclear energy should be kept open so as to include clean nuclear energy in the broader framework of sustainable development, with at the same time an enhanced effort on research to develop viable and renewable energy sources. Policy makers should be able to choose between several clean energy options"

ITER should demonstrate the scientific and technological feasibility of fusion energy generation. International negotiations with Japan, Russia and Canada are progressing well. "It would be very good if ITER was built in Europe and I am glad to see that two Member States, France and Spain, have asked to host this facility" stated Mr Busquin. "I hope the US will join the consortium again and help us develop this promising technology."

As far as nuclear waste management is concerned, each Member State will be in charge of its own strategy and build its own facilities, but the co-operation with the Commission will ensure a harmonised approach across Europe, and the pooling of world-class expertise.

The Euratom programme will also promote joint evaluation of innovative concepts for nuclear energy generation with potential benefits in terms of safety and low environmental impact. It also includes research on radiation protection, not only in relation to nuclear energy, but also in medical treatment and industrial applications.

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