

Chirac Sees EU Deal with Japan on Fusion Research

A French politician on a foreign visit: facts are different at the negotiation table.

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TOKYO – French President Jacques Chirac said Monday he believed the EU would soon reach agreement with Japan over the site of a proposed experimental nuclear fusion reactor.

Progress on the \$13 billion international project known as ITER (Latin for "the way") has stalled as Japan and the EU vie to host the facility. The EU has threatened to build the reactor alone if an international consensus is not reached by July.

"I don't doubt an agreement can be reached rapidly between the EU and Japan," Chirac told a symposium on sustainable development in Tokyo. ITER's six backers are divided evenly over the two possible sites, with Cadarache in France backed by Russia and China, while the United States and South Korea (news – web sites) are supporting Japan's bid to bring the project to the northern village of Rokkashomura.

"We hope for a solution with the six members of the project. A solution within this framework is our priority," Chirac said in an interview published in the regional daily Tokyo Shimbun on Monday.

"Tokyo has made constructive propositions that allow us to create a framework for a balanced deal. We hope that a consensus can be rapidly formed," he added.

Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told Chirac on Sunday that Japan had no intention of withdrawing its proposal.

Nuclear fusion has been touted as a long-term solution to the world's energy problems as it would be low on pollution and use sea water as fuel. Half a century of research has, however, failed to lead to a commercially viable fusion reactor.