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Environment minister disclaims responsibility for nuclear plant deal



Roettgen says he had no hand in the nuclear extension deal

The German environment minister on Wednesday said he and his department played no part in the government's recent decision to extend the running times of nuclear power plants in Germany.

Environment Minister Norbert Roettgen on Wednesday said he had not been involved in the deal to extend the lifespans of Germany's nuclear power plants.

"I did not play a part in formulating the contract, and neither did any member of the environment ministry," Roettgen said during a special sitting of the environment ministry committee in parliament, according to government sources.

Roettgen had earlier argued for a shorter extension of the running times while Chancellor Angela Merkel's government hammered out the deal, which has met with widespread criticism.

However, the environment minister also said there had been no need for his ministry to take part in the discussions, because they focused on financial issues arising from the nuclear sector's profits, rather than safety issues which are his department's area of responsibility.

When extending the running time of Germany's 17 nuclear power plants by an average of roughly 12 years, the government struck a deal with the major atomic energy providers on a new tax on nuclear fuel rods and other voluntary financial contributions designed to help develop the renewable energy sector.

During the debate, Roettgen never really offered his support for the plan and frequently said that he would oppose pushing such a contentious policy through by the back door.

German citizens "betrayed"

Germany's main opposition parties, who introduced the previous plan to shut down all atomic power plants by 2021 and have pledged to



Greenpeace, and much of Germany, opposes the policy

reverse the nuclear extension should they regain power, said Roettgen's statements show that the government forged a "secret deal."

The leader of the Green party's parliamentary group, Baerbel Hoehn, said the safety of German citizens had been "betrayed and sold" by the government.

Meanwhile, the parliamentary leader of the Social Democrats, Thomas Oppermann, said that Roettgen's exclusion from the deal showed a "deep discord" between Chancellor Merkel and her minister for the environment.

According to Oppermann, "Merkel left Roettgen standing outside in the rain, like a schoolboy."

The government maintains that traditional sources, most notably coal and nuclear power, must serve as a bridge towards a more environmentally-friendly energy policy, pledging to harvest four-fifths of the country's power from renewable sources by 2050. When she announced the new plan, Merkel said it would eventually prove itself "the greenest in the world".

In Wednesday's committee meeting, Roettgen was keen to focus on renewable energy, outlining plans for a new special fund to help develop renewable energies and improve energy efficiency - partly funded by new levies on nuclear power providers.

"We are improving safety levels," the environment minister said, adding that Germany would use nuclear power "for as short a time as possible, but for as long as necessary."

Author: Mark Hallam (apn/dpa)

Editor: Susan Houlton