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Nuclear debate heats up in Germany over new tax and plant lifespans



Germany's nuclear power plants operators have threatened to pull out of nuclear power generation in protest of a proposed tax. The general debate over the future of German nuclear power has heated up again.

Atomic power producers want plants to remain in operation indefinitely

Controversial negotiations are underway in Germany between the government and energy providers as companies threaten to shut down their nuclear power plants over a proposed tax on fuel rods and Germany's debate over its nuclear energy future reignites.

News magazine Der Spiegel reported that the operators of Germany's 17 nuclear power plants - RWE, E.ON, Vattenfall and EnBW - have said they will cease nuclear energy generation altogether if a planned 2.3 billion euro annual tax on fuel rods is introduced.

Deputy Finance Minister Werner Gatzert has been conducting negotiations with the four providers to find an alternative to the tax, with the companies reportedly offering the government up to 30 billion euros (\$38.3 billion) in exchange for permission to continue running nuclear plants for an additional 12 years.



Critics say Schäuble can be bought by energy companies

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble came out in favor of the proposed deal, as it would guarantee increased government revenue. He was joined by Chancellor Angela Merkel, who also praised the proposal.

'Dirty business'

According to an agreement signed by the previous center-left German government, nuclear energy is supposed to be phased out in Germany by 2020. Merkel's ruling center-right coalition wants to postpone this date, a position which the government opposition strongly opposes.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, leader of the Social Democrats' parliamentary group, came out against the energy producers' proposal while the Greens' Renate Kuenast told a regional daily that the proposal

was "dirty business: billions for an [extended] run time, money for the comeback of a dangerous technology."

Kuenast added that the opposition would not put up with the proposal and planned to make life difficult for ruling coalition come autumn.

Environment minister left out

A spokesperson from Germany's environment ministry said that the environment minister Norbert Roettgen was not involved in the negotiations. He said that the proposed fuel rod tax was a compromise aimed at encouraging the development of alternative energy sources.



The environment minister wants a tax on fuel rods

Before the electric companies proposed to buy their extended time, Roettgen had advocated a much shorter extension of the time allowance coupled with heavy taxation, putting himself at odds with Germany's leading business associations.

The president of the BDA national employers' association, Dieter Hundt, told the Hamburger Abendblatt he supported an unlimited extension of nuclear power plant lifetimes, declaring it "economically and environmentally irresponsible to shut down safe and profitable atomic power plants for ideological reasons."

Hans Peter Keitel, president of the federal association of German industry, took a stronger position against Roettgen's proposals, saying the minister should realize he was "not the head of Greenpeace."

Merkel launches energy tour



Half of Germany wants nuclear power plants to be shuttered

Under the cloud of the stepped-up nuclear debates, Merkel is expected to announce plans on Monday to visit nuclear and other energy plants in preparation for her government's much delayed energy plan aimed at solidifying laws governing Germany's energy sources.

Germany is split on the issue of nuclear energy, with just over half the population favoring the eventual shut-down of plants.

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