

French energy minister calls for new generation of nuclear reactors

January 13 2015, by Marie Heuclin



Technicians works at the construction site of the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor on November 21, 2014 in Saint-Paul-lez-Durance, southern France

France should build a new generation of nuclear reactors to replace its ageing power stations that provide a majority of the country's electricity, the energy and environment minister said Tuesday.

Despite French firms being world leaders in [nuclear energy](#), the

country's Socialist government has been keen on ending France's status as the world's most nuclear-dependent country.

The minister, Segolene Royal, made the comments in the trade magazine *Usine Nouvelle*, giving the first signal the government will keep nuclear a major component in France's energy production despite reducing it in favour of renewables.

"In the building of a carbon-free economy, nuclear is clearly an asset" and its role in the mix of various energy production methods needs to be evaluated in an "intelligent manner", said Royal.

"We should plan for the construction of a new generation of reactors to take the place of the old power stations which cannot be renovated," she added.

While Royal presented this in the interests of safety, the call for the investment in a [new generation](#) of reactors is a development in that it signals the government sees nuclear continuing to play a role after the current reactors reach the end of their service life.

It is also a development that will likely be welcomed by French companies EDF and Areva, which have suffered in recent years as interest in [nuclear power](#) cooled following the 2011 Fukushima catastrophe in Japan.

President Francois Hollande promised a makeover in France's energy policy during his 2012 election campaign, and lawmakers in the lower house of parliament voted last year to reduce reliance on nuclear from more than 75 percent to 50 percent within a decade.

That bill, which must now be considered by the Senate, would cap production of electricity from nuclear reactors at 63.2 gigawatts,

meaning the construction of any new power plant would require putting an old plant into retirement.

France, which is the number two country globally in terms of nuclear [energy production](#), has 58 reactors located in 19 [power stations](#).

"It is important to build new reactors because France needs to have a technological lead, even more so in that the global market for renovation is enormous," said Valerie Faudon, the head of the French Nuclear Energy Society.

But environmentalists expressed concern about Royal's announcement.

"Rather than launch the construction of new [reactors](#) which are extremely costly to build and generate electricity at an expensive price per kilowatt hour using imported uranium, it would be better to move into renewable energies," said Denis Baupin, a member of ecologist group in the French parliament.

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