



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 7, 2023

## 11 EU States Set Up Nuclear Energy Alliance

Eleven European Union (EU) member states pledged at the end of February to “strengthen cooperation” on nuclear energy, which they claimed will help Europe reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia vowed “to support new projects” together with existing nuclear plants, based on a statement unveiled during a meeting of EU energy ministers in Stockholm.

“Nuclear energy is one of many tools for achieving our climate targets,” to produce electricity to meet consumer demand, and “for security of supply,” they declared.

Besides, ministers from the 11 countries contemplated opportunities for more scientific collaboration on nuclear energy and to share best practices to tackle safety issues.

France — which has long depended on atomic power for — has led the campaign to enhance European nuclear energy relations.

Prior to the ministers’ meeting, the office of Ecological Transition Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher said France’s aim was to “create a nuclear alliance” and that the alliance’s primary purpose was to “structure cooperation across the entire nuclear value chain” and supply Europe with “all the tools to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.”

The nuclear energy alliance hopes to “strengthen industrial cooperation in the development of European nuclear capabilities,” consider “joint industrial projects” for new technologies such as small reactors, encourage research and innovation, and set up “uniform safety standards in line with international best practice.”

Speaking to reporters following the meeting, Pannier-Runacher remarked, “It was a very good discussion which helped to highlight common issues. These questions are those of innovation and new PRM reactors, the question of skills, the authorization of new installations.”

Paris claims nuclear power can help France and the rest of Europe attain their climate aims, particularly to produce “green” hydrogen for transport and industry.

However, the issue of nuclear energy has divided Europe, with various EU states vehemently opposed to it.

Leading critics of the nuclear-energy issue are Germany and Spain. Indeed, Austria, Germany, and Luxembourg maintained their opposition in Stockholm to the development of nuclear energy in Europe. Concerns were cited about safety and radioactive residuals.

“If we want to win the race against climate change, we need to be fast,” Luxembourg Energy Minister



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Claude Turmes posited, elaborating that new nuclear stations would take 15 years to build.

“It’s much more about ideology than being practical,” he added.

While Sweden did not sign the joint declaration, it was involved in the meeting and voiced interest in joining the group. Eventually, Stockholm chose to remain neutral on the divisive issue. Additionally, Italy has hitherto expressed an interest in wanting to join the alliance, with Pannier-Runacher reiterating that the group remains open to new members.

At the moment, the EU is also in talks about an overhaul of the electricity market, which has also divided the bloc.

Although France suggested long-term energy contracts at guaranteed prices that it claimed would boost nuclear production, Germany is fiercely against such a move.

Currently, France, Sweden, and Hungary use nuclear power, while other countries including Poland want to build their first reactors.

In January this year, the EU allocated 242 million euros to Finland to establish for the first time a reserve against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear threats for use by all member states, according to a statement from the Finnish government.

“Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has confirmed the need to strengthen the EU CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) preparedness,” European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic declared in a statement.

The reserve will comprise rescue equipment and medical supplies, such as antidotes and radiation meters, that are meant to defend first responders and the civilian population, Finland’s interior ministry stated.

Finland shares a 1,300km border with Russia and is situated close to the Baltic states. Countries in that region worry that an escalation of the conflict in Ukraine could give rise to the use of nuclear weapons or a nuclear accident.

“The stockpiles to be established in Finland will improve the European Union’s strategic preparedness and readiness to respond to different kinds of threats, especially in Northern Europe and the Baltic Sea region,” Finland’s interior minister, Krista Mikkonen, said in a statement.

Ready for use beginning in 2024, the reserve will allow for deployment of supplies to a disaster or crisis area within 12 hours of an offer of assistance being accepted, the statement read.

Finland stocked up huge quantities of national reserves of essential goods such as grains, fuels, and medicine for years after it lost around 10 percent of its territory to the Soviet Union, after tackling an invasion attempt by the Soviets during World War II.

Meanwhile in Asia, Japan under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also declared its plans to depend on nuclear energy to “power a bright future” after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear incident.

Kishida’s government is poised to “maximize the use of existing nuclear reactors” under a new policy blueprint authorized by an advisory panel on “green” transformation last year. Once again, nuclear power would be a vital contributor to Japan’s energy mix.

Reactors taken offline since 2011 will be rebooted, with their lifespans extended beyond the current 60-year cap. The plan also calls for replacing decommissioned plants with “innovative” next-generation



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reactors, and even constructing new ones “based on future circumstances.”

In 2022, Tokyo experienced major blackouts a couple of times, amid mounting pressures on Japan’s electricity grid. Electric bills in the Greater Tokyo region have also soared, with estimates expecting an average household to pay ¥9,126 (\$67) in December last year, up 22 percent from the ¥7,485 (\$55) in the same month in 2021.

In light of the energy crunch, Japan declared a national *setsuden* (electricity-saving) period on December 1 for the entire winter season till the end of March 2023.

Dr. Naoto Kasahara, a specialist in nuclear reactor structural engineering at the University of Tokyo, told *The Straits Times* that nuclear power was essential for energy security as well as for Japan to attain its “green” goals by 2050.

He said, “If Japan does not proceed to restart or build new reactors, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the nuclear industry and secure human resources.”



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