
Armenia To Build New Reactor At Its Nuclear Power Plant

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YEREVAN, October 24 (Itar-Tass) -- Armenia has made a decision to build a new unit at the operating nuclear power plant to replace the one to be decommissioned, Energy Minister Armen Movsesyan said.

"An alternative to the nuclear power plant in Armenia could be only a new nuclear unit that will meet current safety and security requirements," the minister said in an interview with the Voice of Armenia newspaper on Wednesday.

The decision to build a new reactor was also prompted by the fact that the country has commercial reserves of uranium, Movsesyan said.

"While it was economically unprofitable to produce this radioactive material before because of the low prices, now the situation has changed," he said. "So Armenia will have its own energy supply and its own nuclear reactor."

"Armenia has no goal of introducing enrichment technology in the country. Especially since our reserves may not be big enough to enrich uranium inside the country," he said.

"Preliminary estimates show that Armenia has enough uranium reserves to meet the needs of its own nuclear power plant and export part of them," the minister said.

In his view, the best solution would be to build a 1,000 megawatt power unit since the republic's electricity needs grow at about 4 percent a year.

In determining the capacity of the new reactor, the government is taking into account not only internal needs of the republic but also regional energy problems, he added.

"A 1,000 megawatt power unit will be able not only to meet the needs of Armenia and reduce the country's dependence on organic energy [gas, oil, etc.] considerably, but will also have certain energy importance in the region," Movsesyan said.

Armenia "will stop the operating nuclear reactor only when and if it obtains alternative generating capacities that match it," the minister said.

"When we speak about alternative capacities, we mean not only physical parameters, i.e. the volume of electricity generation, but also economic ones, i.e. its cost for the population," he said.

"The European Union is seeking to stop the reactor as soon as possible. But since the reactor's service life ends in 2016 and we have no replacement for it at the moment, we cannot announce its decommissioning," the minister said.

"If we build a new reactor sooner, the operating one may be stopped before that date," he added.

"At any rate, we are clearly and openly showing the world our readiness to move in parallel towards the decommissioning of the operating reactor at the nuclear power plant and replacing it with a new, more modern, effective and safe one," Movsesyan said.

In his words, the development of a feasibility study for building a new reactor at the Armenian nuclear power plant is underway with the assistance of foreign specialists. This work will be completed within 1-2 years. The document will "substantiate the optimal scenario for us", the minister said, "from the optimal capacity of the reactor, technology and equipment, to communications, infrastructure and seismic characteristics."

He did not rule out that the Armenian nuclear power plant may use of a Russian, Canadian, American, European or Japanese reactor, or it may install a hybrid, as Bulgaria did, using a Russian reactor but European electrical machines and mechanisms, and the American safety system.

"We hope that individual countries, private and/or state companies, international organisations or their consortium will be able to form a financial offer that is necessary for the construction of a new reactor at the Armenian nuclear power plant," Movsesyan said.

The European Union insists that the operating reactor at the Armenian nuclear power plant be stopped. "But we say, create conditions where we could get access to long-term and low-interest (cheap) credits, and we will solve all our problems," he said.
