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# Armenia In Talks With Russia Over New Nuclear Plant

By Armen Dulian

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Russia is ready to help Armenia build a new nuclear plant and is currently discussing the ambitious idea with its government, a top executive of a Russian atomic energy firm said on Thursday.

"We are discussing the issue of building a new 100 Megawatt unit in the territory of the Armenian nuclear plant [at Metsamor,]" Aleksandr Glukhov, vice-chairman of the state-owned Atomstroyexport company, told the Itar-Tass news agency.

"Armenia has unique legislation which allows foreign companies to acquire shares in [local] nuclear plants, which creates new opportunities for them," he said.

The Armenian parliament enacted the government-drafted legislation early last year in what was widely seen as the first step toward the eventual construction of the new plant estimated to cost at least \$1 billion. The authorities in Yerevan hopes to raise the sum from foreign governments or companies interested in financing the project.

President Robert Kocharian reaffirmed in late April Armenia's intention to replace Metsamor's sole Soviet-era reactor, which is due to be decommissioned by 2016, by a new, modern facility meeting Western safety standards. "I think that as early as in 2012-2013 active work will be implemented for a new nuclear power plant," he told university students in Yerevan.

Sergey Kirienko, head of Russia's Federal Agency on Atomic Energy (Rosatom), visited Yerevan around that time and discussed the matter with Kocharian and other Armenian officials. Deputy Energy Minister Areg Galstian said afterwards that the Russian-Armenian inter-governmental commission on economic cooperation has set up a working group tasked with looking into the project.

A senior American diplomat said in June that the United States is also ready in principle to help Yerevan put the project into practice. "We are working with the Armenian Ministry of Energy to develop a feasibility study as to just what would be the best replacement for this capacity," Anthony Godfrey, then U.S. charge d'affaires in Armenia, said.

The Armenian authorities have said all along that Metsamor, which meets about 40 percent of the country's electricity needs, will be shut down only they find an alternative source of cheap energy.

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