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# Kocharian Reaffirms Plans For New Nuclear Plant.

By Emil Danielyan  
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President Robert Kocharian on Wednesday reaffirmed the Armenian government's ambitions plans for the construction over the next decade of a new nuclear power station in place of the aging Metsamor plant.

Kocharian was quoted by his office as telling local and foreign experts sitting on his advisory Council on Atomic Energy Security that the project is "justified both in terms of energy security and economically." No further details were reported.

The government took the first major step towards the project's implementation early last year when it pushed through parliament a bill that allows private and foreign ownership or co-ownership of nuclear facilities located in Armenia. Officials spoke of the would-be new plant as the most viable alternative to Metsamor, which meets about 40 percent of the country's electricity needs and is due to be closed down by 2016.

The government is already making preparations for its decommissioning which has long been sought by the United States and the European Union. Kocharian told the council that the Armenian Ministry of Energy will come up with a relevant plan of actions within two months. According to the presidential press service, he discussed the idea of replacing Metsamor by a similar facility at a separate meeting with Adolf Berghoffer, a German nuclear scientist chairing the council.

Meeting with university students in Yerevan in late April, Kocharian said the government is still ascertaining the necessary capacity and cost of the new plant. "I think that as early as in 2012-2013 active work will be implemented for a new nuclear power plant and the upgrade of the current one," he said.

Putting the project into practice would cost Armenia at least \$1 billion, a sum comparable to its government budget for this year.

Armenian officials hope that foreign investors will foot the bulk of the bill.

So far only Russia has shown interest in financing the project. The issue was on the agenda of a late April visit to Yerevan by Sergey Kirienko, head of Russia's Federal Agency on Atomic Energy (Rosatom).

Also, Deputy Energy Minister Areg Galstian told reporters on Tuesday that the Russian-Armenian inter-governmental commission on economic cooperation has set up a working group tasked with looking into the matter. He cautioned that discussions are currently held "on the conceptual level."

"It's a long process and we have already embarked on it," said Galstian.

U.S. reaction to Yerevan's plans has been far more lukewarm.

"Especially given the geology here, the earthquake zone, it might be better to come up with an alternative to a second nuclear power plant," Tom Adams, a senior State Department official coordinating U.S. economic assistance to former Soviet republics, said in May 2006. "Right now, we are leaning against that option," he added.

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