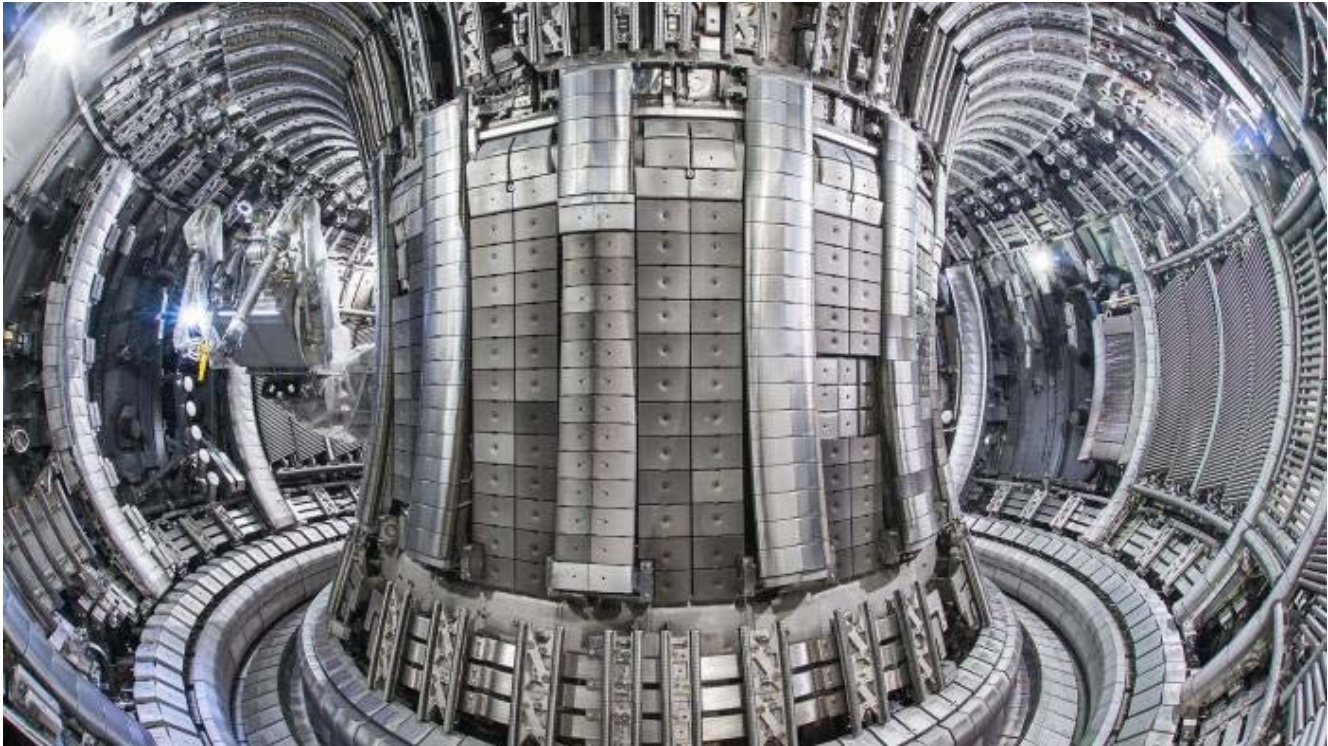


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Brexit

UK confirms it will leave European atomic energy community

Exit from Euratom carries serious implications for nuclear industry and research



Membership of Euratom is a condition of Britain acting as host for the Joint European Torus project, currently the largest nuclear fusion experiment in the world © UKAEA

YESTERDAY by: **Alex Barker** and **Arthur Beesley** in Brussels and **Andrew Ward** in London

Britain will have to strike new international agreements with the US and other countries to maintain access to nuclear power technology after confirming for the first time its intention to leave the pan-European atomic energy regulator.

Exit from Euratom, an organisation that has controlled the peaceful use of nuclear energy on the continent since 1957, will complicate the UK's plans to build a new generation of nuclear power stations and rebuild the country's nuclear supply chain.

Footnotes to the [five-paragraph bill to authorise Brexit](#)

(<http://next.ft.com/content/e4583436-e3be-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a>), published on Thursday, said the legislation would empower the prime minister to leave both the EU and [Euratom](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/euratom) (<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/euratom>), a separate legal entity that is governed by EU institutions.

The decision has wide-ranging implications for Britain's nuclear industry, research, access to fissile materials and the status of approximately 20 nuclear co-operation agreements that it has with other countries around the world.

Although EU lawyers had long concluded that Article 50 notification would apply to the Euratom treaty as well, the UK government had until now insisted it was still considering the implications of the Brexit vote for its membership of the organisation.



A site worker walks through the concrete batching plant at the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station © Bloomberg

Serving notice to leave will open a complex separate track of negotiations, both with the EU and a dozen-plus other countries outside Europe whose nuclear co-

operation treaties with the UK explicitly rely on safeguards provided through Euratom.

The nuclear industry really doesn't like it. It's bad news for the industry, bad news for opponents and critics of the industry as well. It's a lose-lose situation, whereby the industry becomes less competitive and less safe

Dr Paul Dorfman, UCL

Senior people in the nuclear industry said new bilateral agreements would be needed with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the global body overseeing nuclear technology, and, crucially, with the US because several of the UK's existing and planned nuclear reactors use US technology or fuel.

Dr Paul Dorfman, honorary senior researcher at the Energy Institute at University College London, said: "It's bad news for the industry, bad news for opponents and critics of the industry as well. It's a lose-lose situation, whereby the industry becomes less competitive and less safe."

Dr Dorfman added: "The UK has current bilateral nuclear co-operation agreements in place that are predicated on Euratom safety regimes — and all of this has taken a lot of time to put in place. You're talking about key safeguards and assurances and that might have serious implications for UK new-build installations, the nuclear fuel cycle and the UK's enormous waste and decommissioning liabilities."

Rupert Cowen, a lawyer specialising in nuclear energy at Prospect law, said the exit from Euratom amounted to a legal "time bomb".

"Where the UK has current bilateral nuclear co-operation agreements in place, those agreements are predicated on application of the Euratom safeguards within the UK," he said. "As soon as [Euratom] falls away it means those jurisdictions cannot operate with us."

He added that nuclear co-operation agreements can take considerable time to agree and ratify and may not be possible to complete before Britain leaves the EU in 2019.

Euratom can enter agreements or contracts to co-operate with third countries. Eight such agreements are in place — with the US, Japan, Canada, Australia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and South Africa — but they vary in scope.

Any third-party agreement between the UK and Euratom would not be the same as membership of the organisation.

Membership of Euratom is also a condition for [Britain hosting \(http://next.ft.com/content/6ee1ba76-b324-11e6-a37c-f4a01f1b0fa1\)](http://next.ft.com/content/6ee1ba76-b324-11e6-a37c-f4a01f1b0fa1) what is currently the largest nuclear fusion experiment in the world.

Based at the Culham centre in south Oxfordshire, the Joint European Torus project involves some 350 scientists exploring the potential of fusion power, backed by funding from almost 40 countries in the EUROfusion consortium.



The Joint European Torus project is based at the Culham Science Centre in Oxfordshire. It involves some 350 scientists exploring the potential of fusion power, backed by funding from almost 40 countries in the EUROfusion consortium © Eurofusion

The European Commission-owned nuclear tokamak machine has generated about 3,000 cubic metres of radioactive waste in rural Oxfordshire. It will cost about £289m to decommission.

Senior figures in the UK nuclear industry acknowledged that departure from Euratom would be a significant problem but denied that it put new reactor programmes under threat. Horizon, the company owned by Hitachi of Japan which is planning a power station in Anglesey, Wales, using US nuclear fuel, said it was reassured by the government's commitment to quickly put new regulatory arrangements in place.

“Whilst the UK's withdrawal from Euratom would present issues that would need to be addressed we are confident these can be resolved on a timescale that keeps us on schedule to successfully deliver our lead project, Wylfa Newydd,” said Horizon.

The UK government said: “Leaving Euratom is a result of the decision to leave the EU as they are uniquely legally joined. The UK supports Euratom and will want to see continuity of co-operation and standards. We remain absolutely committed to the highest standards of nuclear safety, safeguards and support for the industry.

“Our aim is clear: we want to maintain our mutually successful civil nuclear co-operation with the EU.”

Additional reporting by Jim Pickard

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