

France rebukes EU energy chief over nuclear remarks

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EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - Several European governments have openly rebuked EU energy chief Guenther Oettinger, after the commissioner's reference to a Japanese "apocalypse" last week sent financial markets into a spin.

French energy minister Eric Besson said he pulled Oettinger aside on Monday (21 March) before an extraordinary meeting of EU energy ministers in Brussels, in order to warn the German politician of what was to come.

"I regret some statements which caused shock in France. There's absolutely no need to feed the neurosis," Besson told journalists after the meeting.

Asked whether it was the reference to an "apocalypse", statements that Japan's crisis was in the "hands of God", or the commissioner's suggestion that some European nuclear plants will fail as-yet-undefined 'stress tests', Besson simply responded "all of it".

Sources confirm Besson's criticism at the meeting, adding that Belgian energy minister Paul Marnette also indicated that he "regrets the reaction of the commission".

France and Belgium are among EU member states most committed to nuclear energy, with the technology producing 76 percent and 53 percent of the their respective electricity outputs. France also has considerable nuclear export ambitions, with French companies currently behind one nuclear project in Finland and several in China.

Member states last week signaled their willingness to see 'stress tests' conducted on Europe's 143 nuclear power plants, but failed on Monday to agree criteria for the upcoming examinations.

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