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**Subject: Staffing levels and external resources for Fusion for Energy**

The considerable investment in fusion energy over the last 50 years has made Europe a world leader in the area. Since 2008, the European effort has been focused on the construction and operation of ITER – a world collaboration bringing together Japan, China, Russia, South Korea, India and the US, representing more than half of the world’s population and 80% of its GDP. The European contribution to ITER has averaged a bit less than 1 billion euro a year as Europe is responsible for almost 50% of the device and is providing the buildings and some of the main systems. While ITER is bringing humankind closer to safe, abundant and sustainable energy, the industrial investment is proving very effective in terms of stimulating growth, generating employment and bringing a significant added value in industry.

The remarkable success of the European fusion programme is largely based to the knowledge, skills and competencies, which have been generated over the years from the construction of several smaller fusion experiments in Europe to JET – the biggest tokamak in the world for more than 35 years – now used as a testbed for ITER. The main factor of success has been the European human capital, which has acted as the main vector of knowledge transfer. JET was built by a generation of staff who were contracted by the EU and then joined the Commission Research DG as temporary agents and then officials. Subsequently, they were involved in the preparation and design of ITER and constituted the initial backbone of the ITER Organization and Fusion for Energy (F4E), the EU agency providing the EU contribution to ITER.

The ITER project has proved extremely demanding, in particular in relation to human resources. As the needs grew, F4E became more and more dependent on external insourced staff. In 2018, these represented 62% of statutory staff (a total of 450). In the current long-term staffing plan for 2021-2027, for discussion at the F4E Governing Board on 9-10 July, the statutory staff will remain more or less constant, while the external contacted and insourced staff will skyrocket in relation to the statutory staff.

Both the F4E 2019 External Assessment and the Court of Auditors, in its recent report on the 2018 accounts, have underlined the criticality of the situation and outlined the important risks of such numbers:

- a legal risk that these individuals concerned may sue F4E in the national courts, in order to be recognised as employees;
- a retention risk of high-level and very specialized competencies, as experts would easily move from one job to the other, “selling” their new knowledge and competencies;
- a risk of unclear responsibilities between F4E and contracted or insourced resources, including tasks related to representation and/or evaluation;

Inefficient human resource management, as the management of these resources is performed at local level.

In addition – and despite the higher financial cost of external resources – there is a risk that F4E management would prefer to work with insourced staff as they can be transferred to new tasks or fired at will.

In order to address this situation and mitigate the important risks identified, we would like to ask DGENER and DGHR to work together to redress this situation, in particular by requesting the budgetary authority to allocate more statutory personnel to F4E minimizing expensive external insourced staff.

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