Swiss Move to End Nuclear Era

The Swiss government Wednesday decided to exit nuclear energy by phasing out the country's existing nuclear plants and seeking alternative energy sources, in a response to security concerns following Japan's nuclear disaster.

Switzerland is the second country in Europe, after Germany, to drop nuclear energy as an electricity source after protests flared up amid fears that the reactor meltdown at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi plant, which was hit by an earthquake and a tsunami in March, could be repeated elsewhere.

"The government has voted for a phase-out because we want to ensure a secure and autonomous supply of energy," Energy Minister Doris Leuthard said at a news conference in Bern. "Fukushima showed that the risk of nuclear power is too high, which in turn has also increased the costs of this energy form."

Switzerland generates roughly 40% of its energy from the country's five nuclear reactors. The rest comes mostly from the more than 1,000 hydropower plants located in the Alps and along Switzerland's rivers. Ms. Leuthard said the government hasn't yet fixed a date for when the last nuclear-power station will go offline, but experts believe such a step could happen around 2040.

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