

European nuclear regulators back closer international cooperation and further harmonisation of the rules

29 June 2011

Brussels (Belgium) this evening saw the conclusion of the First Regulatory Conference on Nuclear Safety organised by the European Nuclear Regulators Group (ENSREG), chaired by Carmen Martínez Ten, President of the *Consejo de Seguridad Nuclear* (CSN - Nuclear Safety Council), in collaboration with André-Claude Lacoste and Dr. Ann McGarry, acting as Vice-Chairs.

André-Claude Lacoste, President of the French *Autorité de Sûreté Nucleaire* (ASN - Nuclear Safety Authority) and Vice-Chair of the Conference, closed the meeting, which brought together 450 representatives not only from the main European regulatory bodies but also from regulatory authorities outside the European Union, the principal reference groups in the decision-making process, the electricity companies operating nuclear power stations and civil society.

In his speech, Mr Lacoste called this Conference a milestone and said he was confident that further conferences would follow, which would permit continued progress towards a European methodology for ensuring nuclear safety, first applied with the creation of WENRA (the Western European Nuclear Regulators Association) and now supported by ENSREG and the European Commission. This same point was stressed yesterday by Günther Oettinger, the European Commissioner for Energy

Mr Lacoste underlined how nuclear safety in Europe had been strengthened over recent years as a result of responsibilities for nuclear safety being granted to the European Union and the adoption of the European Directive on nuclear safety as well as the forthcoming Directive on the management of waste and spent fuel. All this has allowed Europe to make progress on harmonising the legal framework, exchanging national experiences and improving communication and transparency on the foundations provided by WENRA, ENSREG and the European Commission.

A 'regional example'

Mr Lacoste reminded the representatives that Europe had showed its ability to provide a common response following the accident at Fukushima. The President of the ASN emphasised that, ‘thanks to the working dynamics already in place’, the events in Japan acted as a trigger which, within only two months and based on a voluntary exercise that began at WENRA, led to the definition of ‘stress tests’ for nuclear plants supported by the 27 Member States and the European Commission through ENSREG. In his opinion, the European Union reacted appropriately by launching an evaluation of the safety of nuclear facilities at regional level.

Mr Lacoste took the view that the events in Japan revealed a failure on the part of those responsible for ensuring nuclear safety and that the measures adopted so far must therefore be intensified. For that reason, the Vice-Chair of the Conference stressed that, under the direction of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), we must continue to strengthen international cooperation on nuclear safety with the aim of ensuring that what happened at Fukushima could not happen anywhere else in the world.

In addition, during his closing speech, Mr Lacoste asked that all countries give priority to strengthening the independence and transparency of the regulatory bodies.

Lastly, he thanked the Chair of the first Conference, Carmen Martínez Ten, for the leadership she had shown in making the meeting in Brussels possible.

This afternoon’s session, chaired by Mr Lacoste, included a panel discussion with interest groups on the stress tests, which began with a presentation by the President of ENSREG, Andrej Stritar, who outlined the timetable adopted for re-evaluating the safety of European nuclear power stations and explained how the European peer review teams should be comprised.

L. Vanhoenacker, the representative of the FORATOM European Nuclear Installations Safety Standards initiative (ENISS) took part in the debate, as did Jan Haverkamp, Greenpeace’s European Adviser on Nuclear Energy Policy. The latter, as a representative of civil society, called on European authorities to continue strengthening the independence of the regulatory bodies and improving the sector’s credibility with public opinion.

During the morning, Mike Weightman, the representative of the United Kingdom Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR), chaired a session on ‘Challenges and perspectives’, in which senior officials of the Finnish, French and Swedish regulatory bodies spoke on transparency, maintaining and developing knowledge, human and financial resources, and management system and safety culture.

The President of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Gregory Jazkco, gave a presentation on the periodic safety review system and evaluation with regard to extending the life of North American nuclear power stations.

Recordings of the presentations given at the First Regulatory Conference on Nuclear Safety in Europe are available through the conference pages of the ENSREG website (www.ensreg.eu).