

Continuously improving nuclear safety

The European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group held its third conference in Brussels on 29 and 30 June 2015. The event, which brought together around 300 delegates including national regulators, NGOs, nuclear operators and academics, had an international flavour with speakers from China, USA, South Korea and Argentina.

While ENSREG's first conference in 2011 had mainly dealt with the work done by ENSREG, its achievements and perspectives and the second conference in 2013 had focused largely on the accident at Fukushima and the lessons learned from it, this year's event sought to build on and move forward from those experiences to promote the continuous improvement of nuclear safety.

In his opening address to the conference, Dominique Ristori, Director General for Energy at the European Commission explained that the EU had the most advanced legal framework for nuclear safety and stressed that the common goal now was the implementation of that framework at member state level, which required the full involvement of European Safety Regulators.

Patrick Majerus who spoke on behalf of the in-coming Luxembourg EU Presidency highlighted that one of the Presidency's priorities would be to strengthen the European position as a promoter of world-wide nuclear safety.

The Chair of ENSREG, Andy Hall picked up on the points made by Mr Ristori and Mr Majerus to emphasise the importance of ENSREG's role in developing a common understanding of nuclear safety issues, promoting continuous improvement in the global nuclear safety regime and guarding against complacency. While Andreas Molin, President of the conference highlighted the global dimension of the conference and, in particular the proactive role Europe takes in nuclear safety as well as how valuable having a wide range of perspectives was to the continuous improvement of nuclear safety.

Key themes that emerged from the presentations given by invited speakers and the discussions with delegates were:

Public engagement – The existence of a large variety of instruments regarding public participation and the importance of effective and efficient implementation thereof, including participation in decision-making regarding LTO, and the challenge of providing comprehensive technical information that can be easily understood.

Operation of nuclear plants – The value of the European and international legal frameworks, the recognition of security vulnerabilities and the balance between the best available and best applicable nuclear safety solutions.

New legislation – The challenge for member states’ safety regulators of ensuring that the intentions of the Nuclear Safety Directive are implemented and deliver real improvements in nuclear safety, the challenge of optimizing peer reviews and crosslinking them with reporting obligations.

Spent fuel, decommissioning and radioactive waste management – Recognition of legal provisions in place and several good practices, but also of the fact that progress is still needed (no final repository for high level radioactive waste, for spent fuel respectively, in operation), the challenge of the implementation of the legal provisions as well as challenging technical and financial issues remaining.

Improvements in emergency preparedness and response – Recognition that improvements in emergency preparedness and response had been made since the previous ENSREG conference but that the question of whether enough had been done remained.

The final address was given by Miguel Arias Cañete, the European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy who spoke about the role that nuclear energy can play in the Energy Union, in particular when it comes to investing in safety, the challenges of managing radioactive waste, and investment and research in the nuclear field in the future. He stressed that his number one priority was that nuclear safety is not compromised, and concluded by saying that “nuclear energy can only live up to its challenges, to its role in the overall energy system, if nuclear safety stays at the centre of our political and technical attention.” He urged nuclear regulators and safety authorities to remain vigilant and not be satisfied with what been achieved, but to be critical of the status quo and ambitious when it comes to safety at home and abroad.

The event was closed by Andreas Molin who noted the progress that had been made since the last ENSREG conference through the on-going co-operation between European partners, and more widely with the global nuclear community. He also expressed his hope that this valuable work would continue, enabling the challenges, which had been discussed during the conference, to be met.

Presentations and video recordings from the event are available from the [ENSREG website](#).