

**Opening speech of the 6<sup>th</sup> ENSREG Conference**  
**Mr Gerrit Niehaus (Germany)**

Commissioner Kadri Simson,  
Director General Rafael Grossi,  
Deputy Director-General Massimo Garribba,  
ENSREG Chair Marta Žiaková,  
Colleagues from the European Commission,  
Friends from the National Regulatory Bodies,  
Participants of this Sixth ENSREG Conference,  
Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning!

It is my heartfelt pleasure to welcome you here in Brussels to the Sixth ENSREG Conference. We have had to wait an extra year to get together for this event - last year, when the biennial schedule envisaged this Conference, the pandemic situation was too uncertain to plan such an in-person event. When the decision was made to postpone the Conference, it was far from certain that the following year – that today – the situation would permit a physical gathering of hundreds of people. But now, we are here in Brussels and I am delighted that so many have been able to come!

Given the current situation and all the uncertainties we still face, we have all gotten used to online meetings and conferences. The number of participants, more than 230, has exceeded our expectations. The fact that so many are here today is a testament to how eagerly we have all been waiting to meet personally and talk to each other face-to-face. But, it also shows that the topics we are here to discuss are hugely important to us.

We are living in times of unprecedented change and transformation that no one could have foreseen just a few short years or even months ago. Today, it seems the world is being hit by crisis after crisis. The climate crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic – and now even a war in Europe.

Please allow me to make some remarks on a matter of grave importance:

The Federal Republic of Germany condemns Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, with the culpable complicity of Belarus, in the strongest terms. Russia's attack on Ukraine is an exceptionally grave violation of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine and the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. It jeopardizes international peace and security.

A war of aggression initiated by a military power against a sovereign country for the purpose of immediate territorial gain is unprecedented in this century and over the last thirty years. We stand with the Ukrainian government and people in their efforts to resist the Russian invasion. We deplore the loss of human life and the suffering caused. We urge Russia to stop putting nuclear installations at risk, threatening both the local population and neighbouring countries. We call on Russia to comply with the law of the United Nations, international humanitarian law and international nuclear law. We call on Russia to bring an immediate end to hostilities and withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory in its entirety.

Against this background, I am delighted and honoured that a Ukrainian delegation has come here to Brussels. I especially welcome the head of the Ukrainian Nuclear Regulator, Mr Oleg Korikow and his colleagues. Mr Korikow, Ukrainian colleagues: thank you so much for being here with us, I am pleased to see you have arrived safe and sound. And we are all looking forward to exchanging our views and experiences with you. As we all know: since the Russian attack on Ukraine, nothing is as it was before. Some particular challenges presented by the Russian military aggression are very relevant and concerning for the nuclear sector. These nuclear challenges will therefore be addressed in an extraordinary session. Those challenges concern the safety of the Ukrainian nuclear facilities. They also concern the European response to dependencies on Russian energy supply, such as coal, oil, natural gas and uranium.

We all are aware of the fact that the EU relies heavily on nuclear fuel provided by Russia. It is therefore crucial to mitigate and minimize such dependencies as much as possible. Another issue which needs to be discussed is how to improve the protection and hence safety of nuclear power plants against military aggressions. We need to analyse and

identify areas where there is potential for improvements – including the cyber security of our installations.

Historically, the primary goal of ENSREG Conferences has been to focus on regulatory and technical issues. However, we cannot and we do not want to shut our eyes to the Russian military aggression towards our friends in Ukraine. That is why the Conference will kick off with an extraordinary session entitled “Ukraine: nuclear safety in times of war” which aims to address some of the issues mentioned before. We have called it an “extraordinary” session because it is the first time that an ENSREG Conference has put such a highly political topic on its agenda. The extraordinary session today will include statements from high-ranking representatives from the European Commission, the IAEA, the Ukrainian regulator SNRIU, WENRA and, of course, ENSREG.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the first topical session, we will learn about how the Covid-19 pandemic has been tackled in the nuclear sector. The session will focus on how licensees and regulators got through the Covid-19 crisis, the challenges they faced and the lessons they learned. Most importantly, we will examine whether any shortcomings have been identified that we need to address from a regulatory point of view. Also bearing in mind that the Covid-19 situation could worsen and that we may see another pandemic in the future, potentially more dangerous than Covid-19.

Topical session number two is dedicated to public participation in waste management and Long Term Operation. I personally believe citizen participation, and transparent and honest communication with stakeholders is key in regulatory decision-making. It enhances public awareness, understanding and confidence. I am therefore particularly curious about and interested in this panel discussion.

Tomorrow’s topical session number three will focus on another crisis of our time: global climate change. It has become more and more evident that the climate crisis will change our social landscape and the means by which we produce our energy. If we want to maintain our standard of living, we need to take immediate action. So far, our response to the need for decarbonisation has been insufficient both in terms of scale and speed – despite time running out. But what is the solution? Should we revive and focus on nuclear energy generation? Can or should we rely on an ageing and increasingly unreliable fleet of reactors? Are new-builds, including SMRs, with long construction times and premature

designs feasible options? Especially in times where the fight against climate change is a pressing and urgent matter and solutions need to be implemented immediately. As I stressed before, time is of the essence. Therefore, one of the questions we need address is what role evolving, but not yet marketable, nuclear technologies can possibly play in the race to reinvent energy generation and put a stop to global warming. And, what are the safety implications of the envisaged market expansion of new smaller or larger nuclear power plants in more politically or environmentally unstable regions of the world. I am very pleased that topical session three on 'regulatory challenges of new designs' will look into these issues.

Tomorrow's last topical session is no less important - quite the opposite. Nuclear research has a great impact on the improvement of nuclear safety and the advancement of nuclear technologies. In this session, experts will elaborate on how to choose wisely and how to prioritise topics for nuclear safety research. In addition, we will be looking into how to best set out criteria on effective R&D-money distribution to ensure the greatest benefit for society.

Ladies and Gentlemen. The Steering Committee of this Conference has prepared an impressive programme addressing extremely valid issues. The panels comprise high-ranking representatives and outstanding experts. We have the pleasure to be guided through this Conference by the best and most experienced ENSREG Conference moderator, Ms Ann MacLachlan. Furthermore, the Commission has welcomed us to their premises here in the Charlemagne Building and is looking after us very well. My thanks to those, who have made this event possible. Please enjoy these two days.

And now, I am delighted to finally be able to say that I hereby declare the Sixth European Nuclear Safety Conference open.

Thank you very much.