

# **6<sup>th</sup> ENSREG Conference 2022**

## **Speech of Mr Elsner**

### **Opening Session**

You are making the 4<sup>th</sup> speech in the Conference opening session, preceded by:

Conference President Mr Niehaus;

The Commissioner for Energy K. Simson (recorded message);

IAEA DG Grossi (recorded message);

And followed by:

WENRA Chair, O Gupta

Chairs of ENSREG WGs 1, 2 and 3

#### **Introduction**

Dear Mr President, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me start by welcoming you all, on behalf of ENSREG, to this, the sixth edition of the ENSREG Regulatory Conference. Emerging finally from the shadow of the pandemic, it is very pleasing to see so many colleagues here in the room today. My colleagues on the organising committee inform me that we have a good range of stakeholders represented today.

I hope that your journey today has not been too perturbed by the strike.

In this respect, I would like to express a special welcome on behalf of ENSREG to the colleagues from the Ukrainian regulator who have had a

particularly difficult - even perilous - journey to the Charlemagne Building.

I am Thomas Elsner, Vice-Chair of ENSREG, and today I will be replacing Marta Žiaková the Chair of ENSREG, who unfortunately had to withdraw at the last minute. She sends her best wishes for the success of the conference. Finally, let me express our thanks to our Moderator Ann MacLachlan, who has previous form in guiding us through this Conference, and whom we are very pleased to welcome once more.

#### **Overview of Conference Programme**

As you have already heard this morning, the holding of the conference was delayed by one year due to the pandemic. I would like to express ENSREG's thanks to the perseverance of the Steering Committee, who had started, but then had to pause the organisation of what would have been the 2021 ENSREG Conference, until pandemic conditions would allow the holding of a physical meeting. The decision to delay was taken to respect the *spirit* of the ENSREG Conference - as a place for participants to make formal, and more importantly, informal contacts.

Beyond, complicating the lives of the Conference Steering Committee, the pandemic had a major impact upon many areas of our everyday lives, including assuring nuclear safety, and the regulatory oversight of nuclear safety. It was therefore inevitable that the programme of the 2022 ENSREG Conference would address the lessons learned in our field by a range of actors, as well as addressing how to apply these lessons to ensuring safety during the next pandemic, or during a safety event taking place under pandemic conditions.

While the pandemic could well be viewed as an “expected unexpected” event, the same cannot be said of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. Few would have expected that such an unprovoked war would be launched here - in the heart of Europe - in the 21st century. Following this brutal act, Sebastian and the other members of the Conference Steering Committee needed to rework the conference programme, as the potential consequences for nuclear safety of such a military conflict are clear and are a matter of great concern to regulators and to civil society alike. They therefore prepared a session bringing together speakers from the European and international nuclear regulatory community, including the Ukrainian regulator, who, every day, has to manage the consequences of the unprecedented Russian aggression as

well as possible in these trying circumstances, which are beyond the experience of most of us. Indeed, some of us will recall a video call with SNRIU, which was suddenly interrupted when our Ukrainian colleagues needed to rush downstairs to the air-raid shelter.

The concurrence of these two events has strongly shaped the conference programme. Nonetheless, we have also found time and space to address other topics, important for regulators and stakeholders.

Both the Nuclear Safety Directive and the Directive on Management of Spent Fuel and Radioactive Waste insist upon the necessity for national authorities to ensure transparency *vis à vis* the general public. But, beyond that, they also insist upon the need for the public to be able to participate effectively in the decision-making process. Today's final session will be devoted to illustrating and discussing public participation in respect of radioactive waste management and long-term operation of nuclear power plants.

It will not have escaped the attention of observers of the nuclear power field that a new generation of nuclear power plants is very rapidly arriving. Industry has learned that, in the nuclear field at least, there are

limits to the principle of economies of scale, and accordingly industry is increasingly focussing upon bringing an almost bewildering range of innovative designs to a practical reality. During the first session of tomorrow, regulators and industry will approach the current status of SMR development and deployment, from a number of angles including, how best to ensure the safety of these new designs, relations between industry and regulators, and the challenges and opportunities arising from harmonisation.

The last session of tomorrow will assess how the needs for nuclear safety research can be effectively fulfilled, or put another way - how can regulatory bodies effectively provide the research community with input on their research priorities? The panellists will also explore related issues such as financing, and maintenance of the necessary research capacities.

All good things must come to an end, and the ENSREG Conference is no exception to this rule, and so tomorrow morning it will fall to Mr Niehaus to close the formal sessions of the conference. However, at the start of my speech I mentioned the *spirit* of the ENSREG Conference, and the sixth edition will maintain this tradition with a cocktail and buffet

lunch , where you can continue your discussions – in a less formal atmosphere.

**Concluding remarks**

The ENSREG Conference provides for two-way communication between nuclear safety regulators and stakeholders. As well as providing an opportunity for regulators to reach out to the general public and other stakeholders, ENSREG itself benefits greatly from these discussions and contacts. In particular, ENSREG Conferences have always provided an important source of input for the ENSREG Work Programme, and I am sure that this year's Conference will be no exception.

Let me finish by thanking once again all those who have, or who will contribute to a successful conference – the Steering Committee, the Conference Chair, the speakers and panelists, and our Moderator - and -  
– on behalf of ENSREG – I wish you all a fruitful 6<sup>th</sup> ENSREG Conference !