

## Summary report of the 6<sup>th</sup> ENSREG conference

On 20 and 21 June 2022, ENSREG held its 6<sup>th</sup> regulatory conference in Brussels. More than 230 participants had registered for the event. About 200 people attended in person, not counting organisational and technical staff, and a further 50 on the average followed the event online. Ms Ann MacLachlan moderated the event.

During the **opening session** we heard from high-ranking representatives from various international organisations. Conference President Mr Gerrit Niehaus, Director General at the BMUV (German regulator), opened the conference with his reflections on the issues to be discussed. Keynote speakers EU Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, and IAEA Director General, Rafael Grossi, provided statements via video. These were followed by speeches from WENRA chair, Olivier Gupta, and ENSREG vice-chair, Thomas Elsner. The chairs of ENSREG's working groups then introduced the mandate and work of their respective groups.

In the context of an **extraordinary session on 'Ukraine: Nuclear safety in times of war'**, dedicated to the situation in Ukraine in view of the war of aggression perpetrated by Russia since February 2022, a delegation from Ukraine was welcomed. Mr Oleh Korikov, acting chair of SNRIU, the Ukrainian regulatory body, delivered an impressive first-hand account of the current situation in Ukraine regarding nuclear safety, and the challenges faced by a nuclear safety regulator in wartime. Ms Lydie Evrard (IAEA), Mr Massimo Garribba (European Commission) and Mr Olivier Gupta (WENRA/ASN, France) then reported on how support had been organised and provided by the international nuclear community and by their own organisations. Furthermore, since war conditions are outside the scope of the existing legal framework, the limitations of EU rules to address such a situation and the potential need to adopt new rules was discussed. The importance of open, direct and honest communication was also emphasised as a means of building trust both within the nuclear community and with the public. Finally, ENSREG vice-chair Thomas Elsner (BMUV, Germany) gave ENSREG's perspective and presented the work it had carried out in three extraordinary meetings and the corresponding statements, before going on to moderate a panel discussion.

In the **1<sup>st</sup> topical session on 'Coping with the pandemic'**, Michael Hübel (European Commission), Alain Vallée (NucAdvisor), Pekka Pyy (IAEA), Bojan Tomic (ENCO) and Pilar Lucio (CSN, Spain) explained how the nuclear sector dealt with a sudden and unprecedented situation affecting every economic sector worldwide as well the private lives of people across the globe when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020. The nuclear sector, it was claimed

by the panellists, showed good resilience overall. This was partly due to existing redundancies and partly because of the high level of responsibility shown by nuclear regulators.

No safety event, no shut-downs and few significant disturbances to outages due to the pandemic were reported. On the contrary, the energy production was highly reliable. However, the panel discussion acknowledged the possibility that some 'long-Covid' effects might still emerge given that we are in uncharted territory. Investments may have been halted, maintenance delayed due to the restricted number of workers allowed to access sites while the pandemic regulations were in place, and staff training - including drills and exercises - were reduced to minimise physical interaction.

The **2<sup>nd</sup> topical session on 'Public Participation in waste management and LTO'** addressed public participation in different settings, notably long-term operation of nuclear power plants, also known as life extension. Ms Kimberly Nick (OECD/NEA), Mr Peter de Preter (ONDRAF/NIRAS, Belgium), Mr Johan Swahn (MKG, Sweden) and Ms Chantal Jouanno (CNDP, France) gave their perspective on what can be a very complicated yet highly valuable instrument, namely public participation. The speakers explained the differences between the legal and extra-legal consultation processes. A successful public debate was seen as requiring discussion of the policy underlying the specific project. The speakers explained why public participation is needed: to understand the concerns of the public, reach out and build trust with them – and because regulators are legally required to ensure public participation under EU law. The 'why' is also of great importance in another sense: regulators have to listen carefully and try to understand 'why' a conflicting opinion exists or might emerge and the public also must be able to understand 'why' a given decision is taken at some point of the process.

In the **3<sup>rd</sup> topical session on 'New designs: Regulatory challenges'**, new reactor designs were discussed from a regulatory point of view. A lot is in the making, a lot is on paper – and one important question that remains to be answered is the role nuclear safety regulators should play and what industry expects from them. We heard that industry expects a harmonised approach from the regulators, but a distinction must be made between the harmonisation of regulatory requirements and the licensing process itself. Regulation must be seen as neither an obstacle to technical innovation, nor a mere facilitator of industry needs. A key message that emerged from the panel discussion between Ms Sylvie Cadet-Mercier (ASN, France), Mr Marco Brugmans (ANVS, Netherlands), Mr William Ranval (ENISS), Mr Mark Foy (ONR, UK) and Mr Nikolaus Müllner (BOKU, Austria) was the need for regulators to ensure the priority of nuclear safety in any common approach to harmonisation of requirements. Again, it was emphasised that early and transparent communication between regulators and licensees is crucial and that early public involvement could be also appropriate. On the subject of

harmonisation, the panel the need to clarify the expectations of each party and to confirm the fields covered by such harmonisation. A question was also raised on whether it falls within the role of the regulator to discuss new design issues with industry. Finally, it was reflected in the discussions that developing a licensing framework for new designs including SMRs (Small Modular Reactors) would take a significant amount time.

The **4<sup>th</sup> topical session on ‘Choosing the key topics for nuclear safety research’**, addressed what greatly affects the future: research. The panel consisted of Mr Juan-Carlos Lentijo (CSN, Spain), Mr Martin Manuel Ramos (Commission’s Joint Research Centre), Ms Vesselina Rangelova (OECD/NEA), Ms Mareike Rüffer (BASE, Germany) and Mr Josef Mišák (ÚJV, Czechia). Their discussion centred around the decision-making process on the kind of research needed to support nuclear safety and the challenges that need to be tackled. This includes developing a research strategy, how to allocate limited resources, and how to communicate research results to the public. Continuously improving nuclear safety needs to be a top goal when setting research priorities. This extremely relevant discussion should be held regularly so that regulators can keep track, including of the innovations addressed in the previous topical session. Regulators need to support the research, as the panellists pointed out. In principle, regulators should be interested in research aimed at demonstrating nuclear safety. But as in reality it can be difficult to conduct research that meets just this requirement, cooperation and coordination between different stakeholders is necessary and the research can serve different goals.

In his **closing remarks**, Conference President Mr Gerrit Niehaus thanked the panellists and the audience for contributing to a lively debate. He noted that the discussions mirrored what characterises nuclear regulation in a European context: each national regulator is responsible for nuclear safety regulation and oversight in its country. There is no central European regulator, but rather a system of decentralised, national regulators who all respect their national responsibility. An open-minded approach has been established thanks to good *communication* and *cooperation* – two words that were emphasised in almost every session. Open and honest communication and cooperation help to set an ambitious level of nuclear safety, which is regularly tested, notably in the various peer review exercises and through ENSREG itself. In this atmosphere of trust, open communication is appreciated, as open and open-minded discussions help regulators do their part in continuously improving nuclear safety across Europe. This valuable culture of openness and honesty must be upheld by regulators across the EU.

Details on the 6<sup>th</sup> ENSREG conference – all available presentations and speeches, two video addresses and the full video recordings of the conference (links valid until June 2024) – can be found at <https://www.ensreg.eu/ensreg-conferences>.