

Session 1

Ageing management from the EU perspective in light of the ENSREG Topical Peer Review (TPR) exercise

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Dear Mr President, dear fellow colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

As we just heard from Petteri's presentation, this first TPR process was quite a success and produced interesting insights. The compulsory self-reflection on an issue that all of us deal with more or less on a daily basis – even though not as specifically – has put things into context that are not always in context in our routine. Furthermore, it has allowed fruitful comparisons of the different national approaches on Ageing Management in the EU.

When evaluating the benefits of this TPR, we need to critically ask ourselves: “Did this exercise really provide any added value on nuclear safety in Europe – or has it rather been a mutual patting on the backs of the Regulators?” While I do not want to play the Devil's advocate – well, maybe that is my intended role by the Steering Committee of this conference – but anyway, what is important, is that we are open to critically evaluating where this process leads to and to scrutinizing the results produced.

For instance, what concerns me is that we are evaluating ourselves and reporting on so many different occasions, we are peer-reviewing ourselves on thousands of pages, we are writing dozens of action plans – but what is the real impact on the ground? The fact that even the Fukushima stress test national action plans of 2012 have not been fully implemented throughout Europe – and there may be valid reasons for each individual case – but anyway, this makes me doubt that the TPR action plans of 2019 will be implemented more promptly. And, what will be the consequence of this? Will there be a follow-up? Or, to put it in plainer language, “Will another army of bureaucrats follow or is there a real chance that instead, it will be an army of technicians?”

It is also worrying me that our own mandatory European standards, the WENRA Reference Levels, were not fully taken into account in the assessment process and in the discussions during the workshop. Who else, if not us as EU Regulators, should do this instead? Beyond any doubt, the issue chosen for this first Topical Peer Review, “Ageing Management of Nuclear Power Plants”, is of utmost importance. As we all know, the European fleet is, to say the very least, not the youngest anymore. Also, since both operators and regulators have in many cases come to the conclusion that the lifetime of NPPs can be extended significantly beyond the lifetime intended, a well-functioning Ageing Management will benefit us all.

However, it is important that the TPR exercise is not considered a means of legitimizing long-term operation. These are two completely different issues – although the TPR report contains quite a few references to long-term operation. It even highlights the participation in

LTO-related reviews such as the IAEA SALTO exercise or the OSART-module on LTO as good practises. Personally, I would have preferred if no such links were made.

We are in a situation where TRPs will take place every six years as stipulated by the Nuclear Safety Directive. While we have more or less just finished this first TPR, we should not hesitate to begin planning for the second one. Here, we have the opportunity to do better in those fields where we identify room for improvement and to show that we are strongly committed to continuously improving nuclear safety and not to simply producing toothless tigers.

Dear colleagues, my “shopping-list” for future TPRs contains firstly and most importantly: more time. We could well use more time to prepare and discuss the technical specifications. We could also do with more time to draft the result reports. And we should use more time to develop a common understanding of our assessment scale and especially more time to discuss and derive results and their subsequent comprehensible presentation. And, finally, it would have been beneficial to have a broader technical expertise – meaning more experts from more Member States. In order to have the TPR system work smoothly, we all need to be fully committed to what we are doing and we need to be certain that we can improve the European nuclear safety landscape. For this reason, let us start the discussion on the implementation of the Europe-wide challenges arising from the first TPR as soon as possible.

Thank you very much.