

EUROSAFE

Berlin 2007

Address

by

Dr. Walter Sandtner, BMWi

Mr. Hahn,

M. Lacronique,

M. van Binnebeek,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

I.

It is a pleasure for me to convey to you the best greetings of the Federal Minister of Economics and Technology, Mr. Glos, to this important EUROSAFE meeting.

Director General Dr. Schuseil, who intended to speak to you today, had to fly to Lisbon at short notice to attend an indispensable EU meeting. He regrets that he cannot be here today and he has asked me to represent him.

This is the ninth EUROSAFE meeting. The high number of participants shows once again the importance of nuclear safety and nuclear safety research. It is especially welcome that three of the leading research centres in DEU/FRA/B cooperate in a constructive and trusting manner.

Though the three Governments have a somewhat different view of the future of nuclear energy, all three agree that nuclear safety, nuclear security and non-proliferation are of paramount importance. Consequently the three Governments support all efforts which lead to further progress in these fields.

But nuclear safety, nuclear security and non-proliferation are only part of the wider nuclear energy issue, which has undergone an astonishing development in the last few years. This development has taken place not only on the nuclear power side, but also in nuclear energy research. I should like to make some brief comments on both areas.

II.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There can be no doubt that a strong movement in favour of nuclear energy is currently taking place around the world, generally called the nuclear renaissance. This is visible in many political initiatives and declarations as well as in the planning and construction of new reactors and the prolongation of the lifetime of existing nuclear power plants. The reasons for this development are well-known and can be summarized in the following five points:

- The first one, as so often, is a psychological factor. After Chernobyl the international community was in a state of shock. No new reactors were ordered and there was a widespread scepticism as to whether nuclear energy would ever again play an important role. In many countries this shock apparently has been overcome. In our country this process takes a somewhat longer time, but many people are confident that a change will come. Germany has always been a sufficiently energetic and dynamic country: it will not drag on for too long in a resigned attitude.
- The other four reasons are of a more practical nature. There is manifestly a strongly growing energy need throughout the world. At present, China and India are the two most energy-hungry countries. But the situation in a series of other states is not very different. This enormous energy need can only be covered by making use of all energy forms, including nuclear energy.
- Another cause is the growing energy dependence. The European COM has made it clear that at present the EU member states cover 50 % of their energy needs from imports. This figure will grow in the next 30 years to 70 %. This is a shocking level of dependency. It is difficult to understand how, in the light or rather in the darkness of such figures, the phasing-out of nuclear energy can be maintained.
- A fourth reason is the price level of the different energy forms. Due to the considerable price increases in the last two years, especially for oil and gas, many people are having second thoughts. Nuclear energy and hydropower are the two most inexpensive energy forms and should be used accordingly.

- The fifth reason is the fact that nuclear energy causes no, or only very low, CO₂ emissions. This is an especially important argument in a period in which the climate debate is dominating public opinion. In this context it is especially important that the IPCC, to whom together with Al Gore the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded, has explicitly recognized that nuclear energy has an important role to play in the solution of the climate problem.

Against the background of these five points also in Germany a gradual rethinking of the nuclear issue is taking place.

Emnid, the renowned German Opinion Research Institute, recently published figures showing that, according to new opinion polls, a majority of the German population, that is 48 %, is in favour of a prolongation of the duration of nuclear reactors, while 44 % are against.

An intensive discussion is also taking place in the political parties. There is a clear awareness of what is going on in many other countries, and the feeling is growing that Germany once again may be riding the wrong horse.

In this context one might be allowed to mention that the last two Ministers of Economics, namely Werner Müller, who negotiated the phasing-out policy, and Wolfgang Clement, have repeatedly and nearly fervently expressed themselves in favour of nuclear energy since they left office. This change of attitude is truly remarkable and reflects their growing concern that the phasing-out policy will in the end bring Germany a lot more disadvantages than benefits.

The recent invitation by US Secretary of Energy Bodman to Ministers Glos and Gabriel for Germany to become a full member of GNEP has, however, shown once again that Germany is still far from joining the international nuclear development. Minister Gabriel has not only rejected the slightest idea of German membership of GNEP, which is at present undisputedly prevented by the German legislation, but he even refused any kind of German observership at GNEP. In the end, due to some steps which I cannot describe here in detail, Germany did become an observer at GNEP. In a day-long conference in Vienna on Sunday, September 16, 16 states became members of GNEP and 22 states observers, and these 22, as said, included Germany. I cannot predict whether Germany will remain an observer at GNEP or whether this observership will be terminated due to pressures from the Ministry of Environment.

III.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Science and technology are the cornerstone of economic and social development. Even if the concept of progress is often criticized, the only valid criticism can take the form of alternative scientific arguments.

The overall importance of science and technology was recognized in the EU by the so-called Lisbon strategy decided by the heads of government in 2000 and confirmed in 2005. This strategy foresees a leading role for the EU by the year 2010 and above all the spending of 3 % of GDP on research and innovation in the European Member States.

The German Government is fully committed to this policy and has repeatedly underlined its importance. Minister Glos was appointed by the Chancellor as the national Lisbon Coordinator. The Ministry of Research and Education has worked out a "High-Tech Strategy for Germany" and additional 6 billion EUR is being made available in the federal budget for 2007-2009.

This increase is also reflected in the budget allocation for nuclear safety research. While during the SPD/Green Coalition from 1998-2005 this funding was continuously reduced by a total of one third, since then a steady increase of about 25 % has been envisaged for the period 2006-2011.

This increase has also given us the possibility to strengthen the financial resources of the GRS. We have concluded a framework agreement with the two Executive Chairmen of the GRS, Mr. Hahn and Mr. Steinhauer, and included in the budget title an explicit statement that 50 % of the funding for reactor safety research is reserved for scientific projects of the GRS.

The German Competence Association for Nuclear Technology was founded as early as March 2000. Under the able chairmanship of the Member of the Board of the Karlsruhe Research Centre, Dr. Fritz, it has gained an ever growing importance.

We also notice that some German Länder are again becoming more committed to nuclear research and are establishing new university chairs for nuclear technology. This development is effectively supported by the

four big German utilities, which have created a number of university foundation chairs. In this context it is noteworthy that the number of students interested in nuclear technology is also growing in an encouraging manner.

In the international context a series of important research initiatives has been launched. The most famous ones are Generation IV and INPRO, which started back in 2000. More recently, on September 21st of this year, the Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform (SNETP) was initiated by the European Commission. The first European Nuclear Forum will take place in Bratislava on November 26 of this year.

(As you know, Germany is not an official member of Generation IV. The decisive battle in this regard took place in June 2003 in a German interministerial meeting at State Secretary level, chaired by the Ministry of Economics and attended by a total of 7 State Secretaries. The result was that 5 Ministries were in favour of German participation, one Ministry abstained and the Ministry of Environment not only strongly opposed a German participation, but even threatened with the termination of the SPD/Green Government if Germany did join Generation IV. Against this background, despite a clear majority, but in order not to disturb the peace within the coalition, the conclusion was drawn not to press for German membership of Generation IV. So far there has been no change in this position, despite a certain openness shown by Minister Gabriel in a statement to the German Parliament about one year ago.

Fortunately, at the end of 2005 EURATOM, with the consent of the German Government, became a member of Generation IV, which allows the participation of some German scientists via the EURATOM channel.)

IV.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am coming to the conclusion of my address.

As you know it is generally recognized, not only by firms and enterprises, that trademarks, brand names and symbols are of special importance for the identity and even the success of an ambitious endeavour.

Sometimes the question is discussed what might be an appropriate symbol or representative idea for German nuclear energy research.

I should like to make two proposals:

As you know, some weeks ago the Munich-Garching Research Reactor, the so-called Garching Atomic Egg, celebrated its 50th anniversary. A number of international and national nuclear institutions have or will celebrate similar anniversaries. I am sure that Director General Echávarri will mention the 50th anniversary of the OECD/NEA in Oct. next year. But the Garching Atomic Egg is of special importance for Germany. Many scientific chickens in the form of renowned scientists have crawled out of this egg, and they have been in the forefront of the nuclear development in the world. So I think that the first symbol of the German nuclear energy research is this Munich-Garching Atomic Egg.

The context of the second symbol is the following: In some 10 days Mr. Zippe will have his 90th birthday. There will be a relatively small high-ranking group of about 15 people, who will participate in his birthday celebrations. He is not very well known by the general public and maybe even some nuclear scientists never heard of his name. Well, Mr. Zippe was probably the decisive personality for the development of the gas ultracentrifuge or simply centrifuge. As you know, the centrifuges are the most effective and efficient instruments for the enrichment of uranium. They are highly sensitive technologies and in this manner they should not only be considered as remarkable technical achievements, but before all as signs for the high degree of responsibility and professionalism, which are in the nuclear field even more important than elsewhere.

Against this background I think that the two symbols or trademarks for German nuclear energy research should be the Atomic Egg and the gas ultracentrifuge.

In this perspective, I wish the EUROSAFE meeting successful proceedings, many innovative ideas and above all, despite numerous world-wide problems and dark prophecies, much optimism for the future.

Thank you for your attention.