European Union

Statement on the occasion of the IAEA Board of Governors
Vienna, 4-8 March 2019

Agenda item 3: Strengthening the Agency’s activities related to nuclear science, technology and applications: Nuclear technology review 2019

Madam Chair,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States. The following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey§, North Macedonia*, Montenegro, Iceland*, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova, Norway+, Armenia, Georgia and San Marino.

2. We would like to commend the Director General and the Secretariat for preparing the draft report on the Nuclear Technology Review 2019 (GOV/2019/4). We also thank the Secretariat for the technical briefing organised on 11 February 2019. Taking this Report into account, we would like to highlight a few areas of activity for particular comment.

3. As nuclear science and technologies are one of the drivers for improved health and prosperity and improved living standards for people, we are working with other Members of the IAEA to accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world. As we are preparing for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the EU recalls that this treaty has established a solid, rigorous and successful framework for the transfer of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes in support of development world-wide. Adherence to and full implementation of that treaty is the bedrock to this success.

4. We commend the work of the Co-Chairs, the Republic of Costa Rica and Japan, on the successful organisation of the 2018 Ministerial Conference on nuclear science and technology. With more than 1100 participants, 60 ministers and high-level representatives, this event underscored the growing need and demand for the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology worldwide. The EU strongly supports the activities of the Agency to develop radiation and nuclear related technologies and their application to achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. While we appreciate the efforts of all Member States in agreeing a ministerial declaration, we regret that agreement could not be reached this time on a reference to the contribution

§ Candidate Country
* Candidate Countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania as well as potential Candidate Country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
+ Iceland and Norway are members of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.
the IAEA makes to the fulfilment of pillar three of the NPT. This required significant compromise on the part of EU Member States.

5. The Agency’s contributions to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are important. We noted that the IAEA Director General in his speech to United Nations General Assembly in November 2018 stated that “the IAEA helps countries to use nuclear science and technology to meet at least nine of the 17 SDGs directly”.

6. The EU commends the IAEA for its initiatives to highlight all possible links between the uses of nuclear technologies and the goal to mitigate climate change and its effects. During the General Conference of 2018, the Scientific Forum on “Nuclear Technology for Climate: Mitigation, Monitoring and Adaptation” allowed for a useful discussion on this topic.

Madam Chair,

7. The EU looks forward to the “International Conference on Climate Change and the Role of Nuclear Power” in October 2019 in Vienna. We believe that the Conference should provide a forum to discuss the role of nuclear power in meeting future energy demand and mitigating climate change taking into account the challenges connected with nuclear power. To enable this, we encourage the Secretariat to involve climate change and nuclear power experts as well as other relevant international organisations in the conference, including its preparations. We note statements by the Director General that “nuclear science and technology have a great deal to offer in addressing some of the key challenges of the 21st century”.

8. All countries have their sovereign right to decide whether or not to include nuclear power as part of their own energy mix and Member States pursue different approaches to address energy security and climate change. In this context we appreciate the comments made again in 2018 by the IAEA Director General that the “IAEA does not attempt to influence those decisions” but helps “countries that wish to use nuclear power to do so safely, securely and sustainably”. Some IAEA Member States use nuclear power as a contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emission and mitigating climate change. In this regard, some IAEA Member States stated in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) made before the COP21, and which the Paris agreement encourages to update at least every 5 years, that nuclear power plays an important role in their national energy production.

9. Effective knowledge management, capacity building, and human resource development are key elements in the planning, construction and operation of nuclear installations and are important in order to reach and maintain high levels of safety and security. We commend the efforts made by the IAEA in those fields, including the organization of the Conference on Human Resource Development in May 2018. Programmes such as the International Centres based on Research Reactors (ICERR) based in Belgium, France, the Russian Federation and the USA are essential tools to support capacity building and the development of regional centres of excellence.

10. We underline the need for the implementation of rigorous safety standards in the development and use of nuclear technologies and appreciate all efforts, especially also those by countries planning to introduce nuclear power or radiation technology to implement IAEA Safety Standards. We encourage countries providing nuclear technology to actively support recipient countries in their effort to develop and enhance
their infrastructure and competence. We encourage all IAEA Member States, especially embarking countries, to make use of all IAEA peer reviews and advisory services as relevant and make findings and outcomes publicly available as appropriate and to implement the recommended actions in a timely and transparent manner.

11. The EU welcomes the activities of the Agency to help Member States address spent fuel management challenges and note with appreciation the organisation of the "International Conference on the Management of Spent Fuel from Nuclear Power Reactors: Learning from the Past, Enabling the Future" in Vienna next June.

12. As the fleet of nuclear power plants, and research reactors, inside and around the European Union is increasingly operating for a longer timeframe, early and adequate implementation of measures related to ageing management and development of programmes for long-term operations of nuclear plants and research reactors is of paramount importance. We encourage additional effort to better address all related monitoring, inspections and safety and security needs. In this regard, we highlight that the first Topical Peer Review under the amended Euratom Nuclear Safety Directive on the topic of "Ageing Management of Nuclear Power Plants and Research Reactors" was completed and its final report published on the ENSREG website.

13. The EU and its Member States have already a significant level of decommissioning experience. However further work is needed to deepen our understanding of the technical, financial and human resources and knowledge management dimensions of decommissioning programmes. Projects aiming at disposal of spent fuel and high level waste are proceeding to the implementation phase in several EU Member States.

14. In the context of the creation of the IAEA Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) Bank in Kazakhstan, for which the EU and its Member States made significant financial contribution, we note that the Agency signed contracts with two international companies in 2018 and aims to have the LEU delivered in the storage facility before the end of 2019. We welcome the answers provided in 2019/Note 12 and would like to continue our dialogue with the Secretariat on the further implementation of this project including on safeguards, safety, security and export control.

Madam Chair,

15. We continue to monitor the supply of medical radioisotopes and we commend the Agency for its work in this field. Some brief outages at target irradiation facilities and processors occurred in 2018 and created regional supply shortages but were compensated, proving that international coordination is key to address this issue. A European Observatory was established by the European Commission and industry representatives to recommend, in close collaboration with EU Member State representatives, strategies and policies for a sustainable and secure supply of medical radioisotopes. Further efforts are needed as the current supply arrangements remain fragile due to possible unplanned outages of production facilities. Therefore we call on all involved actors including the IAEA to continue their efforts to ensure sustainable supply of radioisotopes.

16. Moreover, we would like to welcome the IAEA’s work in the field of nuclear applications related to the applications of accelerators and research reactors in environmental studies, biomedical applications, cultural heritage characterization, materials science and radiocarbon dating, among others, which are examples of the high societal relevance and impact of nuclear technologies. The variety of applications of the muon tomography technology, to which European scientific institutions have recently
contributed, is another example of how nuclear technology bears a real potential in the service of the SDGs.

17. We would like to stress the importance of the Renovation of the Nuclear Applications Laboratories (ReNuAL) Project to assist Member States through the peaceful uses of nuclear science and technology in the areas of food and agriculture, human health, the environment and the development and use of nuclear scientific instrumentation. We would like to congratulate the Agency for the recent inauguration of the new Flexible Modular Laboratory (FML). We also take note that additional resources are needed to ensure full functionality of the buildings. We appeal to all Member States, in a position to do so, to continue their efforts and consider a pledge.

Finally Madam Chair,

18. In looking to the future, we continue our involvement in fusion research and welcome further cooperation with the Agency. We appreciated the fruitful exchanges that took place during the 27th IAEA Fusion Energy Conference in October 2018 are already fully involved in the International Fusion Research Council (IFRC) and in the Workshops on the Demonstration Fusion Power Plant (DEMO).

19. With these comments we support the recommended Board action set forth in GOV/2019/4.

Thank you, Madam Chair.