

Statement by
Mrs. Benita FERRERO-WALDNER
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
to the
44th General Conference of the
International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr President,

At the outset, I wish to welcome you and all other participants at this year's General Conference here in Vienna. I do hope that despite the heavy workload ahead of us you will find some time to enjoy the beauty of the city and the surrounding areas. It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election. I wish to assure you that my delegation will, under your guidance, do its utmost to contribute to a successful outcome of this Conference.

Let me also stress that Austria fully associates herself with the comprehensive statement made by France on behalf of the European Union. I can thus confine myself to focus on a couple of issues to which Austria attaches particular importance.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to begin with the issue of nuclear safety. In the last years, a number of serious safety incidents have occurred. They illustrated once more the high risks emanating from nuclear installations, especially nuclear power plants. It is thus imperative that maximum levels of nuclear safety are implemented and maintained in all phases of the nuclear fuel cycle and all over the world. States which are engaged in nuclear activities bear a special responsibility not only towards their own citizens, but also towards the citizens of other countries, in particular neighbouring ones. This is why Austria considers nuclear safety a key issue in the current negotiations on the enlargement of the European Union and stresses the need to enhance nuclear safety so that it reaches a level corresponding to the technological, regulatory and operational state of the art in the European Union. Furthermore, comprehensive and regular information on international and more detailed on bilateral basis are of vital importance to my country. In this connection, I would like to ask the IAEA for assistance in Austria's efforts for ensuring the highest safety standards and the Environmental Impact Assessment of the nuclear power station at Temelin. As you know there is considerable concern in the Austrian population in this respect. I would also like to recall that in our view the existing international nuclear liability conventions are far from being satisfactory and this all the more so since the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage, adopted three years ago, has not yet gained significant support.

At last week's meeting of the Board of Governors, we were pleased to hear that the International Nuclear Safety Advisory Group is currently scrutinizing the safety implications that may result from decisions for the early closure of a number of reactors of Soviet design. The time from the closure decision to the beginning of the decommissioning phase is indeed particularly sensitive as efforts for upholding or improving the necessary safety standards might lose impetus. The problems some countries currently encounter with early decommissioning of non-upgradable nuclear power plants

indicate that provisions for decommissioning and radioactive waste disposal are inadequate. We encourage the Agency to pursue this issue with determination and keep Member States abreast of the results of the respective deliberations.

While safety is a national responsibility, it is clear that national efforts shall be complemented by international co-operation on all safety-related matters. We appreciate the Agency's efforts to contribute to the development of an effective worldwide safety regime comprising international conventions, internationally accepted standards as well as measures to assist States in implementing these conventions and standards. In view of the eminent role of the IAEA in the area of safeguards, it may be worthwhile considering to entrust the Agency with similar competencies in the area of nuclear safety.

In this context, I wish to stress once more the importance of the Nuclear Safety Convention and the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management. The review meetings foreseen in these Conventions, especially the peer reviews, will be valuable tools in improving the safety culture throughout the world. As regards the Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel and Radioactive Waste Management I note with satisfaction that only three ratifications are still missing for its entry-into-force. Austria's ratification process is well advanced and should be completed by the end of this year. We are pleased that this year's scientific forum focuses on the theme of radioactive waste management and hope that it will succeed in creating some kind of multi-stake-holder forum in which experts and the public at large can share their views and concerns and try to find suitable solutions.

We must also intensify our efforts in substantially increasing the safety of research reactors. The rising age and the high number of reactors that are shut down but not yet decommissioned or are not under the control of appropriate regulatory authorities give rise to serious concerns. Austria has repeatedly advocated the elaboration of a legal instrument on the safety of nuclear research reactors, notably by adding a Protocol to the Convention on Nuclear Safety. We therefore urge the Agency to continue to give priority to this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me now turn briefly to the role of nuclear power in the sustainable development debate. As is well known, Austria does not consider nuclear power to be compatible with the concept of sustainable development and to be a viable option to combat the greenhouse effect. Sustainable development, if fully applied to the energy sector, would require substantial increases in energy efficiency and energy saving and a switch to renewable sources of energy. Various scenario studies on future energy demand have shown that the range within which the development of total energy consumption varies is considerably larger than the most optimistic estimate of a nuclear or renewable energy contribution on the supply side.

Furthermore, it is imperative not to focus solely on the design of new reactor types or on improvements of nuclear safety, but also to take other pertinent aspects such as participation of the civil society in decision-making, radiological impacts and human capital as well as cost-effectiveness into account. High level nuclear waste may remain hazardous over thousands of years and needs to be isolated from the environment over commensurably long time scales, thus impairing the ability of

future generations to make their own choices. This, in turn, runs counter to the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report as a „development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Mr. Chairman,

In the field of safeguards, this year’s NPT Review Conference has reaffirmed the central role of the IAEA safeguards system in the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Austria fully supports all efforts to strengthen this regime and welcomes the development and gradual implementation of the „integrated safeguards system” which will allow the Agency to draw well-founded conclusions about the non-diversion of declared nuclear material and the absence of undeclared nuclear activities. The success of this exercise not only depends on the Agency’s determination to finalise its conceptual work and embark into real term implementation, but also on the number of Additional Protocols in force, especially of countries with significant nuclear activities. We renew our appeal to all countries which have not yet done so to conclude safeguards agreements and Additional Protocols with the IAEA as required by Art. 111.1 of the NPT.

The gradual implementation of the integrated safeguards system testifies of the potential of the Agency in the verification of nuclear disarmament and arms control agreements. The reduction of nuclear stocks as envisaged in the Final Declaration of the NPT Review Conference might yield additional challenging tasks for the IAEA. This concerns in particular the limitation and control of access to fissile material. We hope that the Conference on Disarmament will soon be in a position to start negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty and invite the Agency, if time has come, to assist in developing the verification system for such a treaty.

On the issue of illicit trafficking, we encourage the Agency to continue its pivotal role in co-ordinating international efforts to increase the security of nuclear materials and radioactive sources. The most effective way of combating illicit trafficking is clearly the prevention at the source, that is the protection of nuclear material and facilities against unauthorised access. It is therefore essential that effective national physical protection systems, based on international norms and standards, are in place. Austria participates very actively in the current deliberations among experts on a possible revision of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material and advocates broadening the scope of this Convention, in particular by covering also the use, storage and transport of nuclear material on a national level.

Mr. Chairman,

With regard to Technical Co-operation, the NPT Review Conference has stressed the importance of the technical co-operation activities of the Agency in fulfilling the obligations enshrined in Art. IV of the NPT. Austria fully subscribes to this perception, bearing in mind that the term „peaceful uses of nuclear energy” encompasses many meanings. While we remain sceptical about the future role of nuclear power, we support the activities of the Agency in the many non-power applications of nuclear energy, in particular with regard to human health, hydrology and environment. Austria has hence in the past paid her full share of the target figure of the Technical Co-operation Fund and will continue do so.

This brings me to the vexed question of the IAEA budget. We appreciate the efforts of the Secretariat to achieve further savings. We realize, however, that the aforementioned activities and possible future tasks place additional strain on the limited resources of the IAEA. Austria has repeatedly emphasized that the growth of the tasks of the Agency must be accompanied by a budget which is commensurate with the additional needs. This holds especially true for the area of safeguards where the implementation of the new safeguards measures under the Additional Protocol and the development of the integrated safeguards system will at least in the beginning lead to an increase in costs. We are very pleased to note that at the meeting of the Board of Governors last week agreement was reached on the future financing of safeguards as well as on the financing of technical co-operation. I hope that the same spirit of compromise and realism will finally prevail as we will discuss the budget of the Agency in the years ahead.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me conclude by reassuring the IAEA and Director General ElBaradei of the continued support of my country. The challenges the Agency faces in the different pillars of its work are huge and - in view of the diverging priorities of the Member States - even daunting. I remain, however, confident that these challenges will as in the past be fully met.