

44th Session of the LAEA General Conference

Statement by Mr. Anthony Borg

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Malta

Vienna

21 September 2000

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to open my brief intervention by congratulating you on your election to the presidency of this Conference. I am sure that your able leadership will continue to guide this conference to a successful conclusion. Congratulations are also due to the Secretariat for the excellent documentation prepared for use by delegations.

I am also pleased to convey the appreciation of the Government of Malta to the Agency and its staff, for the commitment it has shown over the years in the promotion of nuclear safety throughout the world

Let me also, on behalf of my delegation, warmly welcome Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and the Central African Republic as new member states of the Agency.

At the outset, I also wish to state that Malta is in full agreement with the statement made earlier by the distinguished delegate of France on behalf of the European Union. I wish, however, to make some remarks on Malta's relations with the Agency, and on my country's policy in the area of nuclear materials.

Malta joined the IAEA quite recently. The greater use of nuclear technology applications for purposes other than energy production, and the ever growing trade in radioactive substances, together with the necessity to combat the illicit trafficking in such substances, has made it pertinent for even small non-nuclear states like Malta, to join in the activities of the Agency.

Malta is now planning the enactment of legislation to establish a central authority for the control of activities connected with radioactive substances. The Agency's assistance will

probably be sought for this purpose. It is to be pointed out here that Malta, not having any nuclear power plants of its own, did not, until recently, consider the establishment of such an authority a priority. This does not mean that Malta was not careful in the handling of radioactive substances. In the absence of local regulations in this area Maltese officials are guided by British standards in all activities undertaken in connection with nuclear materials.

Radioactive substances are used in Malta, primarily, in the medical field. As most of our medical personnel handling these substances received their post-graduate training in the UK, the observance of British regulatory standards on the use of nuclear material is therefore found very convenient. Other personnel whose work is related to the handling of radioactive substances, such as those working in the Customs Department and the in the Occupational Health Unit, also find the application of British standards very effective.

Malta became a member of the IAEA in 1997 with the objective of upgrading its activities related to radioactive substances to the highest international standards. This must be done through:

- the enactment of the necessary legislation and the creation of the required administrative structures and mechanisms necessary for the implementation of such legislation;
- the drawing up of the relevant regulations and the training of the human resources required for the application of such regulations; and
- the purchase of the necessary equipment and the training of personnel in the use of such equipment.

Action has already started. Equipment for the detection of radioactive substances in containers handled at the Malta Freeport, and in other merchandise containers entering Malta through other ports, has already been obtained with the assistance of the United States, and a course of training in the use of such equipment was held in Malta last November. Personnel from the Customs Department, the Police, and the Armed Forces participated in this course. This course, which was organised by the IAEA with the support of the European Union, the United States customs authorities and INTERPOL, was also open for participation by personnel from other Mediterranean countries. In fact, about ten of the thirty participants in this course came from such countries.

The Government of Malta recognizes the important role the Agency plays in nuclear non-proliferation. The administrative process necessary for the ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty has already started, and it is now only a matter of time till these two treaties are ratified.

Mr. Chairman

I am pleased to say that in the short period in which Malta has been a member of the IAEA the co-operation between the Agency and Malta has been considerable.

Two experts from the Agency visited Malta in 1998 for talks with local public officers on the development of a policy in connection with the handling of radioactive substances. Some of the proposals made by these experts have in fact already been put into effect while others will be put into effect in the near future. A number of Maltese personnel whose work involves the handling of nuclear materials have attended courses under IAEA sponsorship.

There are also a number of ongoing projects in Malta with the co-operation of the Agency. These include projects in veterinary services, civil protection and medical services.

Mr. Chairman

The Government of Malta sees its membership in the IAEA as an important element in its foreign policy.

The main objective of Malta's current foreign policy is the attainment of early membership of the European Union. Membership of this union imposes on the Government of Malta the obligation to adhere with the whole of the *acquis communautaire*. The Government of Malta is confident that, with the support of the IAEA, Malta will be in a position to satisfy the criteria of the *acquis communautaire* in the areas related to radioactive substances in a short time, thus bringing Malta's membership in the European Union closer to reality.

Mr. Chairman

The Government of Malta looks forward to continued co-operation with the Agency, in the interest of nuclear safety.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.