

Welcoming statement for the 21st CEG Meeting
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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Federal Public Service Economy, SMEs, Middle Class and Energy, I have the honour to welcome you in the beautiful historical city of Bruges at the occasion of the 21st meeting of the Contact Exert Group. I hope you enjoy your stay in this agreeable environment.

Belgium has always been a strong supporter of the Contact Expert Group. It was one of its first contributing members. Over the years, the group has gradually gained in importance and it is a pleasure to see here such a big attendance in the meeting of today and tomorrow, from so many countries and different international organisations.

At the moment we see a revival of nuclear energy in the world. Decisions to build new nuclear power stations have been taken or are about to be taken in many countries. Nuclear research has expanded the last years with activities on reactors of the fourth generation and separation and transmutation. But we must avoid that the success of this revival is jeopardized by the legacy of the historical activities. Apart from the necessity to take measures to protect the population and the environment from the possible dangers of this legacy, the nuclear community has the duty to prove to the outside world that it is able to tackle any problem and to solve the remaining problems of the past in order to preserve its future, which now looks bright again.

For this different reasons Belgium has always given a big attention to solve its own legacies. For the same reasons, Belgium finds it important that the legacies in other countries are also handled in an appropriate way. Therefore, Belgium has always supported the waste management activities in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and in the countries of the former Soviet Union, which have been and still are sponsored by the European Union and by other countries in the world.

Belgium itself has also sponsored bilateral programmes with several of these countries in which some aspects of waste management are treated. These countries are amongst others: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria.

Belgian firms, in particular Belgatom, are involved in the realisation of the waste treatment and spent fuel storage facilities at the Chernobyl site, sponsored by the Nuclear Safety Account of the EBRD. In order to help to solve the financial problems related to these facilities, Belgium has recently increased its contribution to the NSA.

Furthermore, Belgium has also recently decided to increase its contribution to the Chernobyl Shelter Fund. Due to the rising costs of the new shelter around the damaged unit 4, it is important that enough money is gathered for this shelter and Belgium has wanted to contribute its mite to it.

A few years ago the Belgian Government decided to support a bilateral programme with the Russian Federation in the fields of waste management, decommissioning and decontamination and soil cleaning and site restoration. The annual amount spent on this programme from the Belgian side amounts to 350.000 EUR in the economic conditions of 2005. The bilateral programme is concentrated on the North-West region of Russia, but other areas can also be covered, according to the wishes of the Russian counterparts.

Many Belgian firms are involved in solving the nuclear legacy of the country. These firms are: the waste management organisation Ondraf, its daughter company Belgoprocess, the already named firm Belgatom, the Nuclear Research Centre SCK.CEN, the technical support organisation AVN, the firm Tecnobel and others. The Belgian nuclear legacy consists of:

- The old Eurochemic plant: the decommissioning of the process building of this plant, which is of a very complicated nature, is in an advanced stage.
- The old waste treatment facilities of SCK.CEN. The most remarkable achievement here is the realisation of two treatment facilities (building 280/adapted Pamela facility) for the medium and high-level waste of what we call in Belgium, the HRA/Solarium and alpha-contaminated waste. These two facilities, together with the low-level waste treatment facility CILVA, allow Belgium to treat almost any type of waste, even of complicated form and of large dimensions.
- The old facilities of SCK.CEN. The most important achievement here is the decommissioning of the BR3-reactor, a small pilot PWR power plant of 11MWe. Its decommissioning is also in an advanced stage.

You have the occasion on Friday to see the activities related to the old Eurochemic plant and the old waste treatment facilities during the visit of Belgoprocess.

Thanks to all these activities of a very different and diverse nature, the Belgian firms mentioned have gained a lot of valuable experience in the remediation and restoration of the legacies of the past. This experience is put to fruitful use to help to solve the nuclear legacies in other countries, amongst which the Russian Federation, for which we are gathered here today and tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I will not take more of your time. You have a very heavy agenda in front of you. I wish you an excellent meeting and I hope it will give rise to positive results.