

an Outsider looking in



an Insider looking out

Mr. Panoyotis Papadimitropoulos of Greece knows the IAEA inside and out. Most of the time, he likes what he sees.

His name seems to have more letters than the alphabet can hold — one of the reasons why many people in the international community simply know him as “Papadim”. When Mr. Panoyotis Papadimitropoulos was a young scientist with the Greek Atomic Energy Agency he attended the third IAEA General Conference and has been involved with the IAEA in some capacity for nearly 50 years. On the eve of the IAEA’s 50th anniversary in 2007, “Papadim” met with Linda Lodding of the IAEA Bulletin to discuss the changing nuclear landscape and the IAEA’s first half century.

How did you first become involved with the International Atomic Energy Agency?

As a young employee of the Greek Atomic Energy Commission, I first came to Vienna with the then Chairman of the Commission back in 1959 to attend the third IAEA General Conference. My country — Greece — was among the founding members that initially signed the IAEA Statute which set up the organization in 1957. I remember that when I first came here in 1959 among the agenda items was new membership and the country under discussion was Iraq as the 65th member.

Since that first visit to Vienna, I continued to come to Vienna in the 1960s and early 1970s for General Conferences, Board of Governors meetings, and Safeguards Committee meetings.

One thing I remember well was in 1961 or 1962, during my visit to the IAEA headquarters at the Grand Hotel, I was taking the lift to the 4th floor. The elevator doors opened and in walked Mr. Vyacheslav Molotov who was serving as Soviet Ambassador at the IAEA. As a young man at the time, I rec-

ognized him as one of the main figures of WWII and later the Cold War.

My background was purely scientific. But, once I joined the IAEA in the mid-1970s, working in External Relations, I began to start thinking politically. The Assistant Director General for External Relations was David Fischer. Fischer was the most knowledgeable individual about the IAEA at that time — he knew why the Agency was formed, how it was formed, what was the real mandate. He had participated as a South African diplomat in negotiating the IAEA Statute in New York in 1954-56 and also served on the IAEA’s Preparatory Commission. He had, in fact, served as a Head of External Relations for almost a quarter of a century. He was a man with a real political sense, a sense which turned out to be so useful at the time of the safeguards negotiations between the Agency and the European Atomic Energy Community.

What main changes have you witnessed in your years working with the IAEA?

Throughout the years following its founding — although the Agency itself was still in the middle of the Cold war period — there was a tacit understanding among major players, particularly the Soviet Union and the USA, to maintain the delicate political balances on which the Agency was founded and keep it, as much as possible, as a technical organization.

About the time I joined in the 1970s, the Agency was going through a slight change of orientation from a purely technical organization to an organization with a more political orientation. Among the main factors that come to mind as having “politicized” the Agency’s work were the disputes about

South Africa's then apartheid policy, the nuclear debate in the Middle East and Israel's bombing of the Osiraq reactor and the Indian peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974. The Indian explosion indeed gave a political impetus to the operations of the IAEA. And safeguards, in particular safeguards inspections, began to be involved in the derogation of the sovereignty of the States. At times, Article XII of the Agency Statute (which deals with safeguards) became the subject of various interpretations.

Of course one can see the changes to the organization in the numbers alone. In 1959, there were about 400 employees of this Agency. Now, there are about 2500. In 1959, the Agency's budget was US\$ 15 million. Now, it's more than US\$ 300 million.

It's been said the world is more dangerous today than it ever was, mainly because of the threat of nuclear terrorism. What's your view?

This is true. For decades the IAEA has had the dual role to promote the development of peaceful uses of atomic energy by also assisting Member States in their development and to provide the assurance, through early detection, that the nuclear programmes of Member States remain peaceful.

However, the expansion of atomic energy, the ever increasing gap between have and have-nots, and the events of 9/11 and after, have tuned major parts of the Agency's activities to the prevention of nuclear terrorism. Although States continue to try to live up to their responsibilities to keep nuclear energy safe and secure, non-State actors threaten to terrorize the world today for the purpose of achieving goals outside international law and order. That threat has, in fact, been a wake-up call also for the IAEA to increase substantively its activities against nuclear terrorism. Groups or individuals who may not have access to a nuclear bomb may use radioactive material or facilities for terrorising our societies. This is something that we have to face today.

The risk of successful acts of nuclear terrorism remains high. Illicit trafficking involving sensitive nuclear material has shown this risk. IAEA verification and the protection of nuclear material and facilities remain an indispensable tool for building confidence among States with regard to non-proliferation undertakings and, at the same time, for promoting the peaceful use of atomic energy for the benefit of mankind. There are many examples of developments at the international level to strengthen security and verification — for example, the amendment of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, the Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, the Security Council Resolution 1540, and a number of others.

Several countries, including my own, have, in October 2006, responded to the Declaration of Principles to counter the

nuclear terrorism threat, adopted in Rabat, Morocco by the G8, where the IAEA participated as an observer. The experience of the Greek authorities during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens is a living example of what can be done. As importantly, over 80 countries have made political commitments to implement the IAEA Code of Conduct on Safety and Security of Radioactive Sources.

We must keep pace with the challenges. Each State must also develop its own mechanisms for protection, but one country's activities alone are not enough. We must all cooperate.

If you had to name three people who have had a significant impact on the IAEA and its work, who would they be and why?

This is a difficult question. There have been so many people who have contributed to the work of the IAEA. I can identify people outside the Secretariat as well as inside the organization. Some stand among the IAEA's "founding fathers".

As I mentioned before, David Fischer was instrumental in the formation of this organization and had been associated with the IAEA for more than 40 years.

I would also recall the Swiss Deputy Director General of Safeguards, Rudolph Rometsch, who had substantive experience in multilateral negotiation. Before joining the Secretariat he was the Director General of EURODIF (European Gaseous Diffusion Uranium Enrichment Consortium). And in fact, in the early stages, he helped the IAEA, with the assistance of Member States and the Agency's Secretariat past and present, to set up the safeguards system.

Another person is Upendra Goswami from India. He joined the Agency in 1958 as Deputy Director General in charge of the Department of Technical Assistance. Again, he was instrumental in setting up the format of what we call today, "Technical Cooperation". The Agency is now *cooperating* with Member States, at the national and regional level, for their own development in the field of nuclear science and technology. Goswami really set up the elements of technical assistance. Later on, of course, others from Mexico, Malaysia and China refined and expanded upon his work.

From Member States, I recall the contribution made by Bertrand Goldschmidt who — for 23 years — was the French Governor to the Board. In 1956 he headed the delegation to the IAEA's Statute Conference and was partly responsible for the successful drafting of Article XII on safeguards (which was accepted as a compromise by the deadlocked conference.)

Another influential founding father was the Swiss Paul Jolles. He served as the Executive Director of the Prepcom in 1957 and later as Deputy Director General of the IAEA (1956-1961). He should be credited with setting up the Secretariat's struc-

ture and function. Later he became the chairman of Nestlé S.A.

However, one shouldn't forget the contribution made by the four Directors General — Mr. Sterling Cole, Dr. Sigvard Eklund, Dr. Hans Blix and Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei.

You have served the IAEA Board of Governors as a member of the Secretariat and you have served on the Board as a member of the delegation from Greece. What's the toughest part about being on body like the IAEA Board?

The major role of the Board of Governors is to promote guidance and achieve consensus on the main directions of the work of the organization. In the old days there were very few exceptions where disagreements existed and those mainly concerned administratively oriented issues. The so-called "Vienna spirit" always helped to achieve this consensus. And almost 99% of all the decisions achieved during the Board have been reached by consensus — with the assistance, of course, of Board Members, the Secretariat and the Director General.

Consensus building is the most important tool — but to achieve it is also the roughest challenge for the Board. Increasingly the work is becoming more political. This could have some dire consequences for peace and security, since it is critical that the Board's decisions continue to be achieved through consensus in order to give them the weight they deserve.

What do you think are some of the key challenges facing the IAEA?

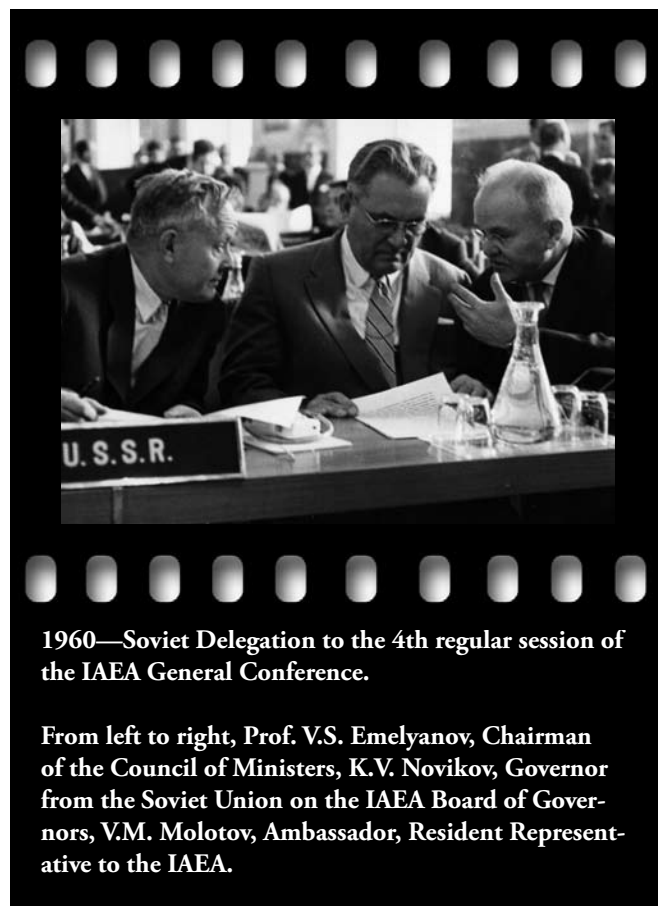
Now that the Cold War seems to belong to the past, the early plans of 1946-47 for a powerful international atomic energy agency for the peaceful applications of atomic energy, including supplies and the fuel cycle — under IAEA control — could become a reality. I have to remind you of the earlier plan made for the creation of a UN Atomic Energy Commission — known as the famous Baruch Plan. The Baruch Plan proposed the creation of an International Atomic Development Authority (IADA) that would be entrusted with control or ownership of all atomic energy activities potentially dangerous to world security. Baruch's plan was "control before disarmament". This plan would have entailed a large transfer of power to an international organization.

It seems that we are now moving towards the realization that internationalization of the fuel cycle management can be a powerful tool for the strengthening of the non-proliferation regime. Internationalization helps to prevent nuclear proliferation, where the role of the Agency will be, in my view, enhanced in the decades to come. However, no solution is pos-

sible, if the public lacks confidence in the international institutions. It is therefore clear that the existing institutions must be revitalized and made more meaningful if we are to make progress. What I'm trying to say is that a forward-looking non-proliferation policy should contain the element of international partnership, achieved mainly through the strengthening role of the Agency. The Nobel Peace Prize of 2005 was recognition of that role. But peace efforts do not have an end, they need to be continually supported and enhanced.

Few diplomats know the IAEA as well as you do. Who will fill your shoes when it's time?

My shoes are small so that shouldn't be a problem! In fact, I am quite optimistic because I believe the young generation can fit in any shoes. I have the feeling that the young generation can do quite a lot. They work fast. They absorb fast. They generate ideas faster. Therefore, despite today's general pessimism, I'm optimistic that tomorrow's leaders will provide sincere leadership in order to cope with the needs of society.



Of course we have problems today in attracting young people into the nuclear sciences. Some attempts are being made — the World Nuclear University is an example of one such initiative. But it's still not enough.

I'm optimistic that the role of the IAEA will stay strong and vital as the world's "atoms for peace" agency.