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S T A T E M E N T

by Mr. Tsanko Bachiyski

Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Agency of Bulgaria

Head of the delegation to the 69th General Conference of the IAEA

Vienna, September 15 – 19, 2025

Mister President,

Bulgaria congratulates you, Ambassador Burian, on your election as President of the 69th Session of the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency. Please be assured of our full support.

We thank the Secretariat for the preparation of the 2024 Annual Report and express our high appreciation to Director General Grossi and all IAEA staff in their work for the achievement of our shared goals.

The Bulgarian delegation fully aligns with the EU statement delivered earlier today. I should like to add some national remarks.

Bulgaria remains gravely concerned over the serious nuclear safety and security risks caused by Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, its illegal seizure of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, and intense military activities in the proximity of Ukraine's nuclear plants and relevant electrical substations. We highly value IAEA's crucial role in monitoring the situation and providing technical assistance to Ukraine. The IAEA's seven pillars for ensuring nuclear safety and security in an armed conflict and the five principles must be respected at all times.

Russia must immediately withdraw all its armed forces, military equipment and other personnel from the ZNPP and return the sovereign control of the plant to Ukraine as its rightful owner. We stand in solidarity with Ukraine in its legitimate pursuit of a just and lasting peace that upholds its sovereignty and territorial integrity in full compliance with international law and the UN Charter.

Bulgaria fully supports the IAEA and the Director General in their professional and impartial work to uphold safeguards implementation and pursue clarity on Iran's nuclear programme. We urge Iran to work constructively with the Agency towards full compliance with its safeguards obligations, and immediately provide full access of the IAEA to all its nuclear material and facilities. We also urge Tehran to use the last opportunity given by E3 and engage in meaningful diplomatic talks as the only sustainable way to address the serious international concerns over the nature of its nuclear programme and ensure that Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon.

Likewise, we urge the DPRK to return to full compliance with all its NPT and IAEA safeguards obligations as a non-nuclear weapon state, and engage in meaningful dialogue aimed at pursuing the complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula. Bulgaria also urges both the DPRK and Russia to abide by the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions and immediately cease all activities that violate them, including in the context of their growing military-technical co-operation.

Mister President,

Nuclear power in Bulgaria is a key element in our country's energy balance, under conditions of high technology, production efficiency, and maintaining high level of nuclear safety, security and radiation protection. Bulgaria attaches great importance to nuclear power and its applications also in the context of achieving carbon-neutral economy. Further, there is high interest from industry in small modular reactors technology as a possible solution to meet their energy demands.

Nuclear safety and security are a major factor for developing nuclear energy. In 2024 Units 5 and 6 of the Kozloduy NPP were operated in full compliance with the international safety standards. The plant's activities to ensure safe long-term operation of the units were demonstrated within the IAEA OSART Mission at the end of 2024. The mission included an independent review of the level of safety in the operation of the nuclear units based on IAEA standards, whereby the IAEA team noted the extremely good preparation of the plant and the full cooperation provided to the reviewers.

Additionally, a number of commendable features of Kozloduy NPP were identified: excellent material condition, impressive housekeeping, and strong bias for action.

Distinguished delegates,

Bulgaria is fully committed to the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS) and the Joint Convention on the Safety of Spent Fuel Management and on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management (the Joint Convention). At the 8th Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties of the Joint Convention, our National Report was approved with the acknowledgement of Bulgaria's strong commitment to implement its obligations under the Convention. The review underlined the conformity of Bulgaria's legislative and regulatory framework for spent fuel and radioactive waste management with IAEA safety standards. It acknowledged our comprehensive experience in NPP decommissioning, SNF and RAW management, and further recognised a good practice for the construction and operation of the Plasma melting facility for RAW processing optimization, thereby distinguishing Bulgaria as one of the 15 Contracting Parties with good practices awarded in this review cycle. As a responsible party to the CNS Bulgaria has submitted on time our national report for the upcoming 10th review meeting and is looking forward to engage actively in the next stages of the review process. My country joins others in support of the efforts for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the review process under both the CNS and the Joint Convention.

Safe and secure deployment of atomic energy for the benefit of the societies is not possible without strong regulatory infrastructure. Accordingly, Bulgaria already 3 decades regularly invites IAEA peer reviews with the last full-scope IRRS Mission successfully held in November 2024. The mission's official report underlined Bulgaria's comprehensive and robust regulatory framework for nuclear and radiation safety covering all facilities and activities and highlighted BNRA as a very mature and competent regulator, with a culture of continuous improvement, which fulfils its statutory obligations without undue influence..

Knowledge management and capacity building are a key element of the safe and secure operation of nuclear facilities. We therefore support IAEA initiatives promoting sustainability of nuclear education and training. Based on Bulgaria's National Strategy on Human Resource Development in the Nuclear Sector 2022–2032, the first 3-year action plan on the Strategy's implementation is being carried out accordingly.

The use of nuclear energy and technologies contributes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We welcome all IAEA activities in line with its 'Atoms for Peace and Development' mandate and strongly support the needs-based, result-driven and non-discriminatory IAEA Technical Cooperation Programme. Initiatives like ZODIAC, NUTEC and "Rays of Hope" are exemplary of IAEA's engagement in the global efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2024-2025 TCP cycle Bulgaria successfully implemented two national projects in the field of human health and agriculture and participates in over 30 regional and interregional projects. We are a reliable host of IAEA trainings and seminars and stand ready to share our experience in nuclear applications with other MS.

In conclusion, let me assure you once again in Bulgaria's strong commitment to the achievement of the IAEA's main objectives: non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, enhancement of nuclear safety and security, and technical cooperation in the peaceful applications of nuclear energy.

Thank you.