

**Dr. Haug's speech at the Welcome Reception for RRFM,  
Sofia (Bulgaria) 30 April 2006, Archaeological Museum; Sofia**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to Sofia for this tenth **International Topical Meeting on Research Reactor Fuel Management (RRFM)** organised by the European Nuclear Society? ENS. My name is Peter Haug; I am the Secretary General of ENS.

First of all, I would like to thank the Bulgarian Nuclear Society, under the direction of its President, Krassimira Ilieva, and its Secretary General, Dr. Maria Manolova, for hosting the conference and for its vital logistical support.

I would also like to thank the RRFM Programme Committee – and in particular the Committee’s chairman, Pol Gubel, for helping ENS to put together a varied and interesting agenda. Last but not least, I would like to thank the many international guests from countries as far away as Japan and the US, for being here with us today. Their special insight and experience will be of great benefit to us all.

I am sure that you will agree that the impressive setting of Sofia's Archaeological Museum adds considerable gravitas and elegance to the proceedings. The history of Bulgaria and the city of Sofia dates back thousands of years. You can trace its origins from prehistoric times, via Ancient Greece - where it was part of the province of Thrace – and the Roman Empire, through the turbulent years of the Byzantine Empire, right up to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Bulgaria has always been a crossroads between east and west, between north and south, a coming together of minds, beliefs and artistic influences.

Today, Bulgaria stands poised to join the European Union and, together with neighbouring Romania, shape the destiny of the Balkans region.

Last year's RRFM was in Hungary and this year we are in Bulgaria. In my view, this reflects the growing importance of the region in both an economic and geopolitical context. The accession of Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia to the European Union has reinforced the collective voice and influence of the nuclear industry within the Community. Bulgaria—with its nuclear sector - will further strengthen that voice. With the nuclear revival gaining momentum and the Balkan region fuelling that revival from the east, these are indeed exciting times for our community. Never before has an RRFM conference taken place within such a positive and promising context.

It is also very appropriate that the city of Sofia gets its name from the Greek word, *sofia*, which means wisdom. I am sure that when delegates return home after RRFM they will all be much the wiser for having taken part.

This year's RRFM is the tenth to have been organised with the technical and logistical support of ENS. The first RRFM that I took part in was in Ghent, Belgium, in 2002. Since then, the event has grown in significance and today provides an ideal forum for debate and expert analysis on issues of fundamental concern to operators of research reactors, engineers and safety experts. All those who have been associated with RRFM over the years can feel justifiably proud with the way it has established itself as a not-to-be-missed event for all those with a stake in the present and future of research reactor fuel management.

The objectives of the conference are clear:

- To serve as an international forum for researchers, operators and decision-makers
- To discuss all aspects of the research reactor fuel management, including new fuel options
- To help improve operational efficiency and fuel safety of research reactors
- To contribute to the search for back-end solutions for spent fuel from research reactors

The RRFM programme concentrates on key areas such as maximising operational efficiency and safety and on improving the physical safety of research reactor fuel. The overriding theme of the whole conference is, I believe, how to reduce the global threat that ill-advised nuclear research poses without missing out on the great opportunities that well-oriented research offers mankind.

Over the next four days, discussions will focus on a number of key areas for research reactors, including:

- Fuel development, qualification, fabrication and licensing
- Spent fuel management, back-end options and transportation
- Reactor operation, fuel safety and core conversion and
- Innovative methods in research reactor analysis

Whatever your particular focus, RRFM is relevant and pertinent to you. By encouraging an exchange of experiences and expertise with fellow professionals, by establishing best practices and by tackling the technical challenges that our industry faces, RRFM can be a source of information and inspiration to everyone.

This year's conference will be the last one that I will take part in as Secretary General of ENS. It will also be the last one organised by Pol Gubel, who has been such a driving force behind its success. Please join me in applauding Pol for his tireless work on behalf of ENS and RRFM (APPLAUSE).

When RRFM 2007 takes place in Lyon, France, a new Secretary General, Santiago San Antonio, will have succeeded me. I wish Santiago, who is today the Secretary General of the Spanish Nuclear Forum, the very best of luck. For me, it has been a privilege to be closely involved with ENS. I think I will leave it in good health and in the safe hands of dedicated and competent professionals. I am also very grateful to all those who have supported ENS so much through somewhat difficult times. Thank you most sincerely.

Today things are looking a lot brighter and, with the help of colleagues across the community, ENS will reap the rewards of a more stable and promising future. As for RRFM – it clearly is here to stay.

But now is a time for looking forwards not backward. So, please raise your glasses, bon appetit and I hope that you will find RRFM 2006 a useful and enjoyable experience.

Cheers!