



INTERVENCIÓN DEL MINISTRO DE INDUSTRIA, TURISMO Y  
COMERCIO

**HIGH-LEVEL SESSION ON THE OCCASION OF A  
SPECIAL 50th ANNIVERSARY MEETING OF  
NUCLEAR ENERGY AGENCY**

París, 16th october 2008

GREETING

Mr. Secretary General of the OECD;

Mr. Director General of the IAEA;

Mr. Executive Director of the International Energy Agency;

Mr. Director General of the NEA;

Ministers;

Ladies and Gentlemen.)

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Secretary General of the OECD; Ángel Gurría, to allow me to participate in this Ministerial Session on the occasion of this Special 50 th Anniversary Meeting of the Nuclear Energy Agency.

## ROLE OF THE NEA

The creation in 1958 of the European Nuclear Energy Agency, later to become the Nuclear Energy Agency, brought together some of the leading countries of Europe, North-America and Asia with a common purpose: to increase the security of the civil usage of nuclear energy.

There have been very relevant changes in the world energy scene since then. Changes that shape today's world energy market and, definitely, pose a significant challenge to the development of the energy sector in the near future.

It is hard to overstate the strategic value of this sector for any country in the world. Energy must lead the way of the other economic sectors or else it will become a bottleneck, a burden, to growth.

There are two key aspects of the energy market I would like to stress today:

- first, energy is the cornerstone of the concept of “sustainable development”, which must balance environmental impact of the use of energy versus the security of supply.
- and, to complicate matters, the pressure to reduce prices and costs, and, accordingly, to liberalize electricity markets. This is rapidly changing the rules of the game and the relationship between the different players: producers, consumers and regulators.

Nuclear energy must find its own place within this background.

There are plenty of concerns about its use and its future. To quote only a few, I would list:

- the need to maintain ever increasing safety levels;
- the final disposal of high and low-level radioactive waste
- the role of civil society in all nuclear policy-making areas
- the non-proliferation and terrorism issues
- the legal issues of liability and compensation for nuclear accidents and damages
- the role of nuclear energy in the global warming debate

- the availability of qualified human resources and, last but not least,
- the significant Public Relations issues regarding its use.

NEA has played a vital role in facing these issues along these last 50 years. It has enhanced international cooperation in this field which, particularly in nuclear safety, is crucial.

International cooperation and close partnership with the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna and the European Commission in Brussels have enabled us to progress towards harmonization and improvement of safety criteria. This is key to guarantee a satisfactory level of protection for both human population and environment all over the world.

Furthermore, the NEA provides a worthy stock of technical and economic studies on practically all nuclear energy related issues. Their reports are an essential tool for those concerned with development of nuclear energy -from technicians and scientist to businessmen and policy makers-. And, as a centre of excellence, NEA, plays a key role in benchmarking, facilitating the exchange of experience, technical expertise and scientific knowledge.

Technological development is key to survival. Available technology must ensure the safety of nuclear power plants management.

This is why the future of nuclear energy rests in ever-increasing levels of safety. Achieving those levels of safety must be our common goal, our standing policy. Only in that case can nuclear energy become a real option to fulfil our energy needs.

We must be aware that safety must be our main concern both in nuclear power-plant operation and the management fuel and radioactive waste. And, increasingly, in the decommissioning of old plants.

Most of nuclear facilities in operation around the world were designed or built in the late 60' and 70'. Many of the equipment and most of the technology that went into their construction are not available today. This poses a challenge and has quite a number of implications for policy makers, regulatory bodies and industry alike. The NEA is also called to play a very important role in this field. We are sure that the NEA will provide a forum to share information on this subject among countries with nuclear power-plants in operation.

Let me refer now to nuclear energy in my country, Spain. Nuclear power has been an important source of energy supply since the mid eighties. However, with energy needs increasing and no new plants being built, the share of nuclear power in our total electricity output has been steadily decreasing. In 2007, our 8 commercial reactors in operation provided just 18% of total electricity output.

The Spanish Government will approve towards the end of this year a long-run study of our energy needs in 2030. Our aim is to analyse the possible evolution of our energy needs and to define our new long-term energy policy. Our policy aims to 3 objectives: guarantee of supply, sustainable development and environmental protection. And, of course, we must do so in compliance with the European objectives for 2020 in emissions reduction, development of renewable energies and the need to improve energy efficiency.

**Whatever be the future of nuclear power in Spain, the Spanish Government is determined to ensure that the use of nuclear energy will be possible only under the highest safety standards, the most reassuring levels of protection to the population and the environment. We count on the Spanish Nuclear Safety Council capabilities to help us to reach the highest safety levels, and the most transparent information standards.**

This is a common concern to all nuclear countries. We, therefore, share an enormous responsibility, together with no lesser opportunities. We must promote international cooperation, the kind of cooperation that NEA facilitates.

Let me finish by congratulating the Nuclear Energy Agency on its 50th. Anniversary. The NEA has an impressive record of hard and fruitful work over those years. It is a pleasure to recognise the very good job Mr. Echávarri, as Director General, and the NEA Secretariat are doing, and encourage them in their future work. I may assure that the Spanish Government, our institutions and experts, will remain in close cooperation with the Agency and will support its future work.

Thank you,