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20 years of ENS: reminiscences and philosophies

Dr Peter Feuz
ENS Secretary General

At this year's General Assembly on July 7 in Helsinki, we were able to celebrate the 20th anniversary of ENS. This is an opportunity to take stock, to look back at our origins and to analyse what we have become.

Six years of European struggle

The founding president of ENS was Switzerland's Alain Colomb, one of our nuclear pioneers who this spring retired from a top management post at EOS, the utility of Switzerland's French part, also called "Romandie". In view of our 20th anniversary Alain Colomb shared many of his reminiscences with me. As far as he could recall it, the first discussions on the possible usefulness of a federation of Europe's nuclear societies took place back in 1969 when he as president of the Swiss Nuclear Society talked to Wolfgang Häfele, then president of the German Nuclear Society. Both presidents felt that something should be done and Häfele asked Colomb to be the prime mover. He said that if he as a German advanced the idea, then the British or the French might be against it. So, Alain spent a frustrating four years to promote the idea of an ENS around Europe. Nothing moved ahead up to 1973. That's when the American Nuclear Society officially announced that it would hold a large European Nuclear Congress in Paris in 1975. Here especially the French reacted strongly. In April 1973 it was unofficially agreed by the chairmen of Europe's more important nuclear societies that a European Nuclear Society should be formed. Alain Colomb was asked to form a preparatory committee. At the time he was still only a modestly paid member of middle management, but out of his own pocket he had to advance 5000 Swiss francs - which would be at least twice as much today - for the expenses involved in creating ENS.

It took Alain Colomb another two years - from June 1973 to June 1975 - to do the groundwork for launching ENS, which was officially created on the first day of the Paris conference, now called ENC-1. That conference was then a real ENS/ANS venture and not a US-dominated event as originally planned by ANS.

Between the first idea and the actual setting up of ENS six years had elapsed: six years of typical European wavering. One does not have to be cynical to realize that only the threat of a US-dominated large conference in Europe and the proliferation of ANS sections in many European countries forced the European nuclear societies to go it together.

The paradox of US challenge

This has to be emphasized here: the main reason for the creation of ENS was not to do something positive together amongst Europeans, but to keep ANS expansion into Europe in check. Even after the creation of ENS this was not easy. Alain Colomb recalls a heated discussion he had with the ANS Executive Director at that time, Octave Du Temple, who was in the process of setting up a Spanish section of ANS. As Alain remembers, he told Octave that if ANS formed a Spanish section, that would mean "war" with the Europeans. This stopped Octave.

Having put down that marker, the next big development in ENS - that is its practical implementation - was ironic and illogical. This first step to being a learned society is to have your own scientific journal. Alain Colomb was asked to start negotiations with existing European technical and scientific publications in the nuclear field - and there were many at the time. He talked to them separately and he talked to them in combination in order to obtain a good offer from one national journal or from an international group of journals to become the ENS periodical. Again European nationalisms, egoism and shortsightedness prevailed. No European solution could be found. So - to say it again - it was ironical but Alain Colomb had to ask the American Nuclear Society whether they would share their scientific journal "Nuclear Technology" with ENS. As astute businessmen the Americans sold us a 50% stake at an imaginatively high price. To pay that stake ENS was compelled to take out a bank loan, arranged by one of its officers. The interest rate was not low either and the loan had to be paid back in yearly installments. This meant that for the first five or six years ENS simply had no money to spend despite the fact that organizations and companies mainly in Germany and Switzerland gave the society large donations. We later sold our 50% share in Nuclear Technology at a profit. Today for our scientific journal we are associated with Elsevier's Nuclear Engineering and Design.

Much talk - no action

For what ENS used to be before it became professional, let me recall one of the first ENS Steering Committee meetings I attended, which in the end proved to be a very important meeting for our future. This meeting took place in San Miniato in early May 1981 - in a medieval convent. Our meeting was actually held in the chapel of that convent. At that time ENS had a Planning Committee which was supposed to tell the Steering Committee what to do. Under the item Planning Committee the chairman went up the stairs to the pulpit above us mortals and read out a 14 - or was it 40 - page edict on his committee's suggestions for ENS activities. His words should have been recorded for the minutes by the presidential assistant, but during the whole "sermon" this assistant was absent - pacing contemplatively and alone around the cloistered courtyard. So, all the proposals went unrecorded. Unfortunately this somehow symbolizes the first five or six years of ENS - 1975 to 1981 - much illusory talk and proposing but no specific action. Throughout its first five years (75 - 80) ENS was mainly run by committees, except during an initial period under the first president who used the secretarial services of the European Physical Society in Geneva.

Call for professional rescue

It is clear that you cannot really manage a large organization via committees. With ENS this became obvious in 1980 when the president Carlo Salvetti was made aware by the auditors that quite a substantial amount of money was unaccounted for. They cautioned him that he could be held personally liable for this, so he had to act and seek the services of

professionals.

At that time I was in charge of a department at one of Switzerland's leading auditing and business consulting companies in Berne, a department which specialized and still does in managing the secretariats of national and international technical associations including the Swiss Association for Atomic Energy. So, as well as managerial experience, we had the nuclear know-how.

Carlo Salvetti came to us with a first contract for 20'000 Swiss francs for 1980. Our first job was to locate the missing files and money. Most of the money was found, some of the files are still missing.

First professional action

But by 1981 ENS was organizationally fit and ready for the new president Pierre Zaleski. He was elected at the meeting in the medieval convent of San Miniato I just mentioned.

At that time probably only a very few of the members of the ENS member societies were aware that they belonged to ENS at all, because our society was not visible to them. That's why Pierre Zaleski felt ENS should have its own membership journal. Many of our members felt that such a journal would compete with their own. They resisted. However, Pierre very persuasively and persistently streamrolled the doubters into the project. Today its name is Nuclear Europe Worldscan, and the first issue appeared in October 1981, only six months after the initial proposal by the new president. The first 16-page prototype issue did not quite reach all of the 13'000 members ENS had at the time. However, by the publishing date of the January issue 1982 we had all the addresses from the member societies for direct mailing of NEW from Berne - except SFEN's. For almost a year the 4000 SFEN copies were sent by truck to Paris and distributed from there to the SFEN members.

NEW as a gift to each member

Some very hard conditions for publishing Nuclear Europe were placed on the secretariat by the Steering Committee and they still exist today. Within two years Nuclear Europe had to become self-supporting and a free service to the members of the member societies. ENS invested only 150'000 Swiss francs into the launching phase and this money came from the sale of our 50% share in Nuclear Technology. The financing was to be mostly through advertising. At the start this seemed to be alright as we were Europe's largest circulation journal from the beginning and the world's number 2. At the secretariat we simply had to make it, if we hadn't the journal would have closed down end 1983. Of course in the beginning of the eighties there was still a lot of optimism on the nuclear market and there were many advertisers who wanted to reach the ENS target group. So, the gamble paid off, Nuclear Europe made it. Only thanks to NEW do most of our members know that they belong to ENS at all.

NEW first became the information link between the European ENS members and later reached out overseas and became the strongest international journal on all nuclear markets outside North America. Now it reflects the nuclear world to Europe and nuclear Europe to the world - hence its name change to Nuclear Europe Worldscan. Still, its prime role is as motivator and integrator among the European nuclear community.

We did suffer set-backs originating from the stagnation of the market for new plants and the concentration + merger process in the nuclear industry. From originally eleven issues per year we had to cut back to the present six. However, these six are exactly what our readers

want according to readers surveys: each issue offers a wide variety of news, features opinions about technology, business, people and politics.

Mission almost impossible

Our journal has grown into the nuclear world's number 1 not only in circulation but also in innovation and quality. Believe me, it was not peanuts to achieve this position and to keep it under our boundary conditions. Remember, NEW must still be self-supporting and a free service to our now more than 20'000 members. Our overseas circulation brings us subscription fees amounting to only about 5% of the overall budget of 1 million Swiss francs. The rest of the money has to be brought in by advertising from a base which gets smaller every year because the merger process in the industry continues and dozens of companies disappear totally. The task is colossal. Only thanks to an advertising partnership scheme in which a number of companies commit themselves to a certain partnership amount at the beginning of the year - for which they then receive a corresponding amount of ads at a reduced rate - is it possible to reach the ambitious goal. But still, whether it's partnership or not, we have to earn almost 1 million Swiss francs through ads which puts those responsible under incredible stress. Will we make it or won't we? This question we ask ourselves almost daily and in the past four years including the present we managed to just make it. When you look at an issue of Nuclear Europe Worldscan you don't realize what kind of efforts are behind it. I don't know of any other technical membership journal which has to live within such parameters. Our own costs for a yearly subscription to NEW are about 45 Swiss francs, so we make a gift of 45 Swiss francs to each of the more than 20'000 members of the ENS member societies. Now you can say that the members do pay membership fees. These were never meant to pay for NEW but as a contribution to the overall operation of the society. The fee paid by the member societies to ENS presently amounts to SFr. 11 per member, which is less than 25% of what their subscription to NEW costs.

I have devoted quite some time and words here to our society's journal because it is a prime example of professional project management within ENS and we all agree that without Nuclear Europe Worldscan, ENS would not be the same. The way NEW is managed is also rather typical for the overall management of ENS.

A professional secretariat

I quickly go back to 1981, when Pierre Zaleski launched our membership journal. In a parallel move towards professionalism he made me Secretary General of ENS. For some of our Steering Committee members it was hard to swallow the principle of having a professional secretary backed by a professional organization; it was difficult to depart from the glorious times of running ENS by committees.

On my side as a no-nonsense person with a background in business administration, I felt somewhat uneasy at first among all the idealistic scientists and engineers who formed the ENS committees in the early eighties. But with Nuclear Europe Worldscan I had a clear first commercial objective for ENS. Some members of our committees still feel uneasy about me because I always want to concentrate on carrying out concrete specific actions and dislike precious time being lost on endless theorizing on impractical ideas which lead to nothing but self-perpetuating talk.

Personally I was lucky to have a succession of presidents every one of whom wanted to leave their imprint on ENS with a new project. Slowly, surely and specifically the philosophy came through that ENS has to serve its members in helping to cope with their problems and not

be simply a remote, self-serving body. Not only our presidents but also our Steering and Standing Committees have become increasingly willing to focus on getting things done effectively.

Learned and industrial

In addition to the approach of pragmatically tackling one important project after the other in an efficient way, there is another strong characteristic in the ENS philosophy: we were founded as a purely learned society. Soon it was realized that it was not enough to deal solely with scientific and technical questions. Nuclear has matured into an everyday business sector and most of the ENS members are employed by that sector. So, while pursuing its role as a learned society, ENS quickly developed a large number of activities in the service of the European nuclear industry. The industry recognizes this and today we have more than 100 Supporting Members not just in Europe but all over the world, who want to show their gratitude to ENS and who want to be part of the world's largest and most dynamic nuclear society. We remain a learned society but with a strong industrial orientation. We have succeeded in becoming a vehicle both for the scientific + technical community and the industry. We have become THE organization of all of Europe's nuclear community.

Integrating East-West

And here, when I speak of all Europe, it must be emphasized that ENS from the late 1980s onward, became a pan-European society. We had started out as a purely West European society which included what was Yugoslavia. When Central and Eastern Europe opened their frontiers, nuclear societies were created in all of the ex-USSR dominated countries and joined ENS. In Yugoslavia we had a special development with the Slovenian and Croatian societies splitting off from the original ETAN Nuclear Division.

Today almost half of the ENS member societies are Central or East European, which has drastically changed our character. However, the strong structure and clear aims of ENS ensured that it was not an overwhelming task to integrate most of our new member societies. As a pan-European society ENS serves as a platform for a constant East-West, West-East exchange in all fields of nuclear energy - especially safety.

The gratis principle

I have to give a last but very important element in ENS philosophy. Not only Nuclear Europe Worldscan has to be a gift to the members but the whole operation of the society must be almost free of charge to the members. ENS is a federation only, the main activities are with the member societies and so they can pay only a rather small amount of their income to their European federation. In 1994 the income from the member societies totalled ca. 137'000 Swiss francs, a small percentage of the overall turnover. It has become ENS policy that most of its ventures must be self-supporting or even make some profit. So the secretariat has somehow become the commercial or business center of ENS, which must try to raise the necessary finances for today's many ENS projects. Here you have the fundamental difference between ENS and the American Nuclear Society. A typical ANS member in the US until now paid 80 \$ per year including Nuclear News, with additional charges for the membership in professional divisions. The overseas members of ANS pay an additional 50 \$ in postage. If we had that kind of money in ENS, we would have no financial problems. Despite this kind of money ANS has financial problems as one could recently read in their membership newspaper ANS News. But it's probably because we are used to being lean that we have never really overspent and learned to live with it.

For the secretariat this task of generating almost all the money needed for the ENS projects and at the same time implementing all the ENS projects and activities, is like dancing on a highwire. Very few people realize that due to this way of operating our affairs the staff of the ENS secretariat is being constantly overstretched. Joking apart, what I like most is hearing from our member societies that the secretariat people in Berne are greedy. They should realize that because we have decided that the member societies should make only a small contribution, the ENS secretariat simply has to make money for the society to live and survive.

Due to the fact that the secretariat is taking care of the finances on the basis of tough business plans, our Board and Steering Committee can concentrate on discussing the important matters like our strategy and our activities. They have also time to initiate practical collaborations between societies and their members. The ENS Board and Steering Committee are very valuable, useful and creative bodies and their mere existence has led to better European coordination in many nuclear fields and to pragmatic collaboration in other sectors.

ENC: the unique world event + ENS financier

The second large venture the ENS secretariat was asked to undertake was the organization of ENC '86 after none of our member societies wanted to take the risk anymore. Fortunately at the secretariat we had an inspiration; the ENCs used to be giant conferences and we succeeded in coupling ENC '86 with a new nuclear world exhibition. This new formula turned ENC '86 into a major success. No nuclear event had ever had such a large turnout and the profits made ENS relatively prosperous. Since then much of the ENS income is generated by the ENCs.

Effective ENS info tools

It is not the place here to enumerate all the ENS projects and services developed in the interest of our member societies. To have an overview on this you can grab a copy of our recently published ENS World Yearbook 1995, our 20th anniversary issue. I brought a few copies along for those of you who don't have it. I must, however, say a few words on our activities in the public information sector, which originally should have been the main topic of my speech today. Let me mention the ENS PIMEs, which have become the traditional international meeting place for the world's leading nuclear communicators. Let me mention our briefing sheet Nucleus for Euro decision makers, which is published in more than ten languages and distributed also here in Slovenia, and let me mention above all NucNet, the ENS initiated and operated rapid fax-based information system which has grown into the world's nuclear news agency. NucNet is beginning to have an impact on media coverage of nuclear, especially regarding the reporting on incidents, where the half-life became much shorter and the information more accurate. Still, as a whole the nuclear community and ENS have so far failed to gain public confidence. That's why at PIME '96 we shall ask ourselves the question what mistakes have we made and how we can change the situation?

President's proposal for a pragmatic info policy

Also our president, Prof. Pekka Silvennoinen called for a new, pragmatic approach to realities by the nuclear community at the 20th anniversary General Assembly of ENS on July 7, 1995 in Helsinki. Mr Silvennoinen stressed that several European utility leaders were spelling out that only in about ten years would it be necessary to consider the possible expansion of most countries' nuclear parks: "So we should not argue now about decisions that will only have to be taken in ten years. By taking this line of not arguing now, we can

avoid antagonising politicians and the public with whom nuclear is presently unpopular". Do have a look at his introduction to the 1994 annual report in the ENS World Yearbook 1995. But I still want to read to you another paragraph of his policy statement:

Mr. Silvennoinen said: "The period leading up to these decisions does not have to be a decade of despair. If we communicate to the public and the politicians this pragmatic, realistic message - that for the time being in Europe we focus on running the existing plants, then we can take the heat out of the controversy and should be able to find a political consensus - even with those who are sceptical about nuclear."

He added: "If we run our business like a normal industry, and even without new plants, we have far-ahead working horizons like any other industrial sector. We want to keep modernizing our nuclear power units, thus extending their working lives to 40-50 years, which makes economic sense. Pragmatic normality, working strength and far horizons will make us attractive to the younger generation."

Jan Runermark and the young generation

The integration of this younger generation into the nuclear community is one of the main tasks ENS has set itself for the coming years. We have created a Young Generation Network which was proposed and pioneered by our president-elect 1996/97 Jan Runermark who died tragically in a car accident on July 24, driving onto a ferry in Denmark homeward bound for Sweden. The death of Jan Runermark, President of ABB Atom and a key-industrialist who should have led our society during the next two years, is indeed a great loss for ENS and it will be difficult to recover from it. May I ask you to stand for a minute's silence in memory of Jan Runermark.

Slovenia, a model within ENS

To conclude, let me turn to the Nuclear Society of Slovenia. It is one of our smallest but one of our most active member societies. Your president, Dr Andrej Stritar, is the first Central European to be elected to the ENS Board, which is the ENS key-leadership body. He helps to shape ENS policies and activities. Small countries benefit more from ENS than the large ones who have large, powerful nuclear organizations and industries. You don't have to build up new tools for everything, you can use tools developed by ENS. You can also benefit from the ENS secretariat's information and documentation office in Berne and from its ability to put you into contact with organizations and experts from other countries who can be of help to you. We have recent examples of close collaboration with your waste organization RAO, the only one with a lady-boss, which we in ENS very much appreciate, having had a woman as president in 1992/93. But you are also doing a lot in the spirit of ENS. A prime example is this second regional meeting on nuclear energy in Central Europe, which you are organizing successfully. More of this kind of ventures are needed and the small Slovenian Nuclear Society with its manifold activities can be a model for many other societies within ENS. The stronger all the members are, the stronger and more effective will their federation be.