

Dear Co-chairs, Excellences,

I wish to thank the IAEA for convening this important conference and for its continued contribution to fostering the global peace, security and sustainable development. The IAEA has successfully carried out its mandate in the core areas of its responsibilities – non-proliferation regime, nuclear energy, nuclear safety and technical cooperation. Faced with the growing complexity of global threats and challenges, the Agency has also successfully adjusted to the changing circumstances and evolving needs of the member states.

Montenegro has significantly benefited from the fruitful cooperation with the IAEA. We approach this cooperation from the standpoint of ensuring safety and security and facilitating sustainable economic and environmental development for the benefit of our citizens. Close collaboration with the IAEA has an added value for Montenegro since it helps us to fulfill requirements stemming from the ongoing EU accession process. I will concentrate in the following only on matters of particular interest to Montenegro.

Over the past years, the Government of Montenegro has made quite some effort and progress on strengthening the national research and innovative ecosystem, including a continuous increase of investment in science and research, though still low on an absolute level. The most recent highlights are the process of adopting the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) with the continuous support of the JRC, and the implementation of a capital project of establishing the first Science-Technology Park in the country, which will be an important element for the implementation of the Smart Specialization Strategy.

Beyond the national aspect, internationalization is one of our most important strategic priorities. In addition to membership in international organisations, of which one of the most important is certainly the IAEA, Montenegro is continuously expanding in joining international infrastructures, in addition to the already established membership in the largest R&I Programmes like Horizon 2020 and others. Prime recent examples are the full membership of Montenegro in EMBL/EMBO and in one of the largest experiments at CERN, CMS, as well as its membership in the pan-European social research infrastructure 'European Social Survey'.

However, there is a strong need for **regional large-scale research infrastructures** to improve the situation not only in Montenegro, but in the whole region of South East Europe. Due to the recent history in South East Europe all scientific activities have very much slowed down. As a consequence, this region suffered ever since from a strong brain drain of the young generation, affecting in particular the best. In contrast, the same region had in the past an intensive technological development. Prime examples are the first research nuclear reactor in this region which operated in 1959, just two years later than in Germany, and the role of the region as one of the founding members of CERN in 1954. To recover this tradition, and in particular to decrease the present large gap compared to the rest of Europe and to revert the brain drain, the most efficient way is to establish a large-scale internationally competitive research infrastructure in South East Europe.

It is a great pleasure for me to recall today the progress both on the political and scientific level towards such a project. A year and a half ago, the Government of Montenegro initiated the establishment of the **South East European International Institute for Sustainable Technologies (SEEIIST)**. This initiative was soon formalized as a Regional project after the signing of a **Declaration of Intent** at a Ministerial meeting at CERN, Geneva. The eight Signatory Parties were

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and the FYR of Macedonia. Croatia agreed 'ad referendum', while Greece participated as an observer. The core of the project is a state-of-the-art '**Facility for Tumour Therapy and Biomedical Research with Protons and Heavier Ions**' which today presents the most powerful method for the treatment of a large number of tumours. Such a therapy centre does not exist in the SEE Region, where a perpetually growing number of tumours are observed. Heavy ion treatments are still in the pioneering phase. It is therefore planned to dedicate 50% of the beam time to research with multi-ion sources, making the SEEIIST project unique in the world. It will thus foster and strengthen the regional collaboration also in the fields of science, technology and industry in the spirit of the CERN and SESAME model '**Science for Peace**'. By building the Facility, there will be many opportunities for technology transfer to the SEE-countries, as well as for embedding our local industry in various aspects of the construction. Moreover, the project will give rise to spin-offs not directly linked to the facility. Capacity building of the young generation is an essential and integral part of the project.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the IAEA for having provided already its support for Capacity Building, and to the European Commission for providing first direct financial support to start the Design Study Phase of the project. I also owe great thanks to the international research institutions CERN and FAIR-GSI for their readiness to host the Working Groups associated with the Design Study Phase until the site of the project is selected. With this project, I have addressed you today also in my capacity as the Chairperson of the SEEIIST Intergovernmental Steering Committee.

To summarize, the SEEIIST project will boost the various national efforts which all the countries of our region are investing to reconstruct their research and economic systems and adapt them to the future needs.

Thank you for your attention