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Director  
Fusion for Energy Joint Undertaking

**Cristiano SEBASTIANI**  
Chair  
Renouveau & Démocratie Union

Barcelona, 16/02/2024

**Subject: Note of 24 Jan 2024 from R&D Union to Commissioners Simpson and Hahn “Urgent need of Commission’s increased support to Fusion for Energy (F4E), inter alia, for its reorganisation”**

Dear Mr Sebastiani,

I would like to take the opportunity to comment on your letter of 23 January “*Urgent need of Commission’s increased support to Fusion for Energy (F4E), inter alia, for its reorganisation*” addressed to Mrs Kadri Simpson, Commissioner for Energy and Mr. Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Budget and Administration.

I fully share and value your Unions interest in the wellbeing of F4E’s staff and for its success as an organisation providing Europe’s contribution to ITER and other fusion projects. I am sure you agree that Europe needs to retain its leading role in this area of research that can play a crucial role in our future energy supply.

I am today at nine months into my mandate as F4E Director and would like to share with you my own reflections about the state of the organisation, the improvements that I have witnessed, the many remaining challenges, and how I intend to proceed in the future.

Let me first stress that I have zero tolerance towards any forms of harassment, aggression or discrimination in the workplace. Be assured that I am ready to utilise all the tools at my disposal through the Staff Regulations to promptly address any instances that should arise.

I personally take very seriously the role of management to set a respectful tone and lead by example. In this regard I agree that restoring trust is achieved through sustained authentic actions demonstrating that we work in the best interests of staff and the organisation.

Over the last years F4E has reinforced its system of detection and support mechanisms for staff in distress. F4E has understandably been under scrutiny in this area and an audit of HR management by the Commission’s Internal Audit Service in 2023 revealed no irregularities and recognised F4E’s efforts to improve staff wellbeing and improve trust, it also made recommendation we will implement to keep improving on those aspects.

On taking up my duties last May, I encountered an organisation that had endured a long period of instability in its leadership team with a succession of acting Directors. Also, three of its most experienced managers left between 2022 and 2023 leaving four of six senior management positions occupied by staff in an acting capacity.

During this period the ITER project, our “raison d’être”, has also been in a crisis with serious technical problems. The resulting uncertainty and publicity surrounding the project has certainly had an impact on staff motivation. We are working closely with ITER to support its successful construction. ITER remains a unique, first of kind, major projects which is the pride of my teams, and Commission colleagues as well a source a pressure and stress not to be underestimated.

The mission letter I received from F4E’s Governing Board was challenging and reflecting a need of deep change. This was not only to ensure that we keep delivering to ITER and our other projects, but also to formulate in six months a plan to integrate F4E and the ITER Organization, a new long-term vision for F4E, implement a comprehensive reorganisation and develop a corporate culture policy.

Thanks to the dedication of F4E's staff and management and constructive consultation with our social partners, I believe that we made good progress. In close cooperation with the ITER Director General, we prepared an integration plan that was endorsed by our Board. This plan was grounded on a bottom-up analysis from our programme teams.

We co-created with staff through interactive workshops a long-term vision for F4E that was welcomed by our Board. The lack of a long-term vision for F4E has been the lowest scoring question in our biannual Staff Engagement Surveys. We are pressing ahead with the implementation of our industrial policy and working more closely with EUROfusion and other stakeholders.

I have been working closely with the Commission's services, and the governance, to finalise a detailed proposal for F4E's organisational structure. I appreciate the importance of grounding these changes on clear principles that are fair and well understood. But while a new organisation is needed, I believe we have to adapt to new ways of working and develop our shared culture.

In your letter I note your opinion that staff want a "completely new era" and "radical changes". I aim that staff sees a meaningful evolution, building on F4E many strengths and aligning it for the future.

Let me conclude by inviting you to come to F4E to meet us. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss your concerns, learn from your experiences and seek constructive solutions in the interest of F4E and the ITER project.

Yours sincerely,

*[Signed electronically in IDM]*

Marc LACHAISE  
Director

Copy Mr S. Grassi, Head of Cabinet Simpson  
Mr D. Muller, Head of Cabinet and Ms S. Bikar, Deputy Head of Cabinet Hahn  
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