

Statement by President von der Leyen with Bavarian Minister-President Markus Söder at the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics

Garching, 11 April 2024

“Check against delivery”

Dear Minister-President, dear Markus,

Dear Professor Günter,

I am really grateful for this invitation. Fusion is the core reaction that powers the sun and stars. And here in Bavaria, you are definitely reaching for the stars. Developing fusion energy is one of the most complex scientific and technical tasks that humanity has ever grappled with. And Europe is a global leader in nuclear fusion research. And Bavaria is undoubtedly leading the way within Europe. As difficult as this technology is, its potential is huge. Fusion is a safe and clean source of energy. It would be an ideal complement to renewable energy in the energy mix of the future. And you, Professor Günter, have just said that we are not far from a breakthrough. There is a real prospect of using fusion as early as the second half of this century.

But it has also become clear today that we still have a steep path ahead of us. To reach the goal, we now need to invest even more in research. The EU supports nuclear fusion through the Euratom research and training programme. The European Union is the main contributor to ITER with €5.6 billion earmarked for ITER in the current EU budget. This is our ambitious international fusion research project. We are proud that European science is leading the race to nuclear fusion. But Europe is not alone in this race. To stay ahead of the pack, we need a more strategic and long-term approach that also involves the private sector.

What form could such an approach take? Firstly, we need to promote more public-private fusion partnerships. Agile young tech companies, like those I met here in Garching today, can help fill the remaining technological gaps. Secondly, we need to encourage industry to invest more in fusion technology. It would itself be one of the main beneficiaries. This leads me to my third point: The spill-over effects of fusion research are significant. The lessons learned are, for example, advancing health, space or robotics. The European strategy must accelerate and facilitate this technology transfer. Then fusion research, such as that here in Garching, would benefit not only our future energy mix, but also lead to the creation of new products and more quality jobs. It would then become a real competitive advantage for European industry. Research and innovation are European strengths. We need to take fusion technology out of the laboratories and turn it from a research task into a business case. Bavaria, with its strong science and start-up landscape, is the perfect springboard for this.

Dear Markus, dear Professor Günter, Europe will support this in every possible way.