



Introductory Remarks by Costis Stambolis

Your Excellencies,

The British Ambassador, Mr. Matthew Lodge, Ambassador Mr Michael Christides, The Economic Councillor of the USA Embassy in Athens, Mr. Erik Holmgren IENE Partners and Associates,

Dear colleagues

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this year's South East Europe' Energy Dialogue, the 14th such event which IENE first started here, in Thessaloniki in 2007.

Over the years this conference has undergone many changes both in terms of structure and content, with the prevailing themes ever changing depending on circumstances and priorities in the broader European and regional agenda. So in the first years electricity liberalisation and energy supplies, predominantly gas and related infrastructure dominated the agenda with this changing to decarbonisation and policy targets for achieving this.

What has not changed though during this entire period is the overall objective of the conference becoming a fertile ground for encouraging cooperation and peaceful coexistence between the various countries in the region, which as we all know have political differences and at times have even encountered hostilities. However, we strongly believe at IENE that energy in its various facets, can be and often is a unifying force which enables and enhances cooperation between countries whatever their opposing views at geopolitical level. A good example being Greece and Turkey which over the last 15 years have developed good cooperation in natural gas (there is a gas interconnector in continuous operation since 2007), electricity and refined products. And of course, there are several more examples including the restive West Balkans.

In today's conference there are a number of subject areas which stand out as requiring special attention. First and foremost is energy security where the SEE

region has a pivotal role to play in a European context. As we are in the second year of the war in Ukraine and in spite of the strengthening of infrastructure, the provision of normal gas supplies is far from assured.

In this sense the strategic role of gas in the overall energy mix, which is disputed by some, emerges as an inflection point and merits special attention. Especially since it's strategic role comes in direct conflict with EU's goals for fast decarbonisation. I expect that this apparent contradiction will be hotly debated during the conference. Hence, how to reconcile the paramount need for energy security with the ambitious goals for lowering gas emissions becomes an issue of great importance in our overall discourse on the need for safe and clean energy in SE Europe.

The operation of electricity markets and the European target model and how effective this is at times of crises is yet another issue which is of concern to the energy companies.

Other topical issues include the further penetration of RES into the electricity grids and the urgent need for their upgrading and modernisation.

Also the anticipated use of hydrogen and Biomethane as substitutes of gas will be discussed together with the challenges posed by the need for greater energy efficiency in the building sector and challenges posed by the spread of electric vehicles.

This year we have enriched the conference content by introducing an Ambassadors Forum as well as a Country Review and a fireside chat. I trust that these new elements will enhance further the usefulness of this unique gathering.

Thank you for your attention,

Without further ado may I now ask John Roberts, who is the conference Rapporteur, to join me by saying few introductory words.