



BELGIUM: PIONEERING THE INTEGRATION OF NATIONAL NATURAL GAS MARKETS

By H.E. Marie Christine Marghem, Minister for Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development of the Kingdom of Belgium

Belgium is largely dependent on imports to secure its energy supply, as it cannot rely on any indigenous energy resources. Belgian energy policy is therefore built around three central pillars: security of supply, sustainability and competitiveness. Diversified energy sources, suppliers and routes are essential to ensure our independence and further expand on our geographical and industrial strengths.

Belgian gas policy focuses on positioning the Belgian market as a gas hub for central-western Europe. This ambition results from a high interconnection rate with our neighbouring countries, excellent internal infrastructure, including significant LNG facilities and storage infrastructure, and direct pipeline links with several producing countries. Moreover, the Belgian network operator, Fluxys, has participations in several key projects across Europe enabling gas to flow to where it is most needed. In addition, in 2015 we were able to finalise the integration of the Belgian and Luxembourg gas markets. This fusion of national markets is a first of its kind in the European Union and may be a stepping stone for similar initiatives in the future. Finally, in light of the gradual reduction in the supply of Dutch L-gas (low calorific gas), Belgium is confronted with a large-scale conversion programme of its existing infrastructure and will look to find new sources of gas supply.

Furthermore, we pride ourselves that the port of Antwerp offers the largest oil, gas and chemical cluster in Europe and the most integrated one in the world. Thirteen of the global top 20 multinationals in the sector are represented in Antwerp, housing three R&D headquarters and over 300 technical suppliers to build, maintain and refurbish this infrastructure. All of these players push for innovation throughout the oil and gas supply chain: process technology, equipment and special services, reliability engineering and operational excellence services. Belgium therefore continuously monitors the competitiveness of its industry and its attractiveness to foreign partners.

In support of these and many other policy goals, as Minister of Energy, I deploy and develop

an active energy diplomacy, inter alia with producing countries. It is in this context that from the outset we have been a supporter of the activities of the International Energy Forum (IEF). It is in this setting that the IEF offers the perfect forum for an exchange of visions on the future of oil and gas production and consumption and other relevant topics between its member states, industry and partner organisations. This open and informal dialogue, which reaches its peak at the biennial ministerial meeting, helps to increase knowledge and experience sharing at a political and technical level, clarifies the role and responsibilities of all involved actors and reduces uncertainty on many energy-related issues. Building on its significant drawing power, the IEF occupies a unique position in the international energy architecture.

At a time when the global economy seems to slowly recover, stability and long-term visibility of the energy sector are more important than ever for consuming and producing countries alike. Moreover, volatile energy prices may hamper and slow down these first careful steps towards economic growth. Consumers are wary about the lagging investments in oil and gas exploration and look for clarity from producing states and companies on their ability to continue to fuel the global economy at affordable prices. Producers on the other hand look for clear indications about the future role of fossil fuels in consuming countries, in particular in the light of the commitments approved at the recent Paris Climate Summit. I am therefore convinced that the IEF will continue to play a pivotal role in securing global energy security. ■



Fluxys' LNG terminal in the Belgian port of Zeebrugge: energy gateway into NW Europe

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