



## **Joint Press Statement by Ministers and Representatives of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Slovenia and VP Šefčovič**

Brussels, 09 December 2014

Today representatives of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Romania and Slovenia (hereinafter as: Member States) as well as European Commission Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič have met to discuss gas infrastructure priorities for Central- and South-Eastern Europe.

Member States directly concerned and the Vice-President discussed the announcement by the Russian Federation and Gazprom to stop the South Stream project. Member States directly concerned took note of the currently unofficial nature of this announcement and invited the Vice-President to clarify the situation with the Russian side. All Member States agreed that the EU must remain strongly committed to integrating Central and South-Eastern European gas markets and diversifying gas suppliers, sources and routes. This is also a key objective of the *Energy Union*, one of the priority projects of the new Commission.<sup>[1]</sup>

The integration of gas markets and the diversification of gas supplies will namely require putting in place the necessary infrastructure and implementing harmonised rules for the benefit of customers in that region. This can be achieved by implementing key regional projects (e.g. LNG terminals with corresponding pipeline systems, connections to the Southern Gas Corridor, or the development of East Mediterranean and Black Sea offshore gas reserves), by improving interconnections within the region, in particular between Bulgaria and its neighbouring countries, and by improving North-South interconnections enabled with bi-directional flows. New routes operated in line with EU law can also contribute to increased security of supply in the region.

To achieve this common objective, and in view of the vulnerability of the region as demonstrated in the recent stress tests, it is crucial to swiftly complete projects already underway and speed up development of projects of common interest identified as being of strategic importance. In this context Member States and the Vice-President welcomed the joint statement signed today by Greece, Bulgaria and Romania on the natural gas "Vertical Corridor" connecting their countries.

Member States and the Vice-President agreed, also in the view of the results of the recent stress tests, to set up a *high-level working group* consisting of the concerned Member States with the support of the European Commission to coordinate these efforts to facilitate the development and execution of cross-border projects as well as trans-European projects allowing for diversification of gas supplies to the region. The first deliverable of the high-level working group will be to develop an action plan for integrating Central and South-Eastern European gas markets and interconnections.

Concerned Member States and the Vice-President were also united in their view on the importance of the involvement of the Energy Community Contracting Parties in the process of improving market integration and supply diversification in the region.

It was agreed that the more general issue of Europe's energy security will be further discussed in broader terms having in mind the new scenario of gas supply.

[1] [http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf)

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General public inquiries:  
[Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](tel:0080067891011) or by [email](#)