

Opening Remarks of Ambassador Kate Byrnes at  
Macedonian Energy Forum 2020  
Monday, November 23, 2020

Good afternoon everyone.

I'd like to thank the co-organizers of this event, ZIP Institute and the Government of North Macedonia, and all the people who helped put this forum together. I'd also like to thank the panelists for generously contributing their time and knowledge here today.

It is a real honor for me to address you and have this opportunity to discuss energy priorities in the region and how we can increase cooperation in this critical sector.

Around the world, energy policies have far-reaching impacts on economic growth and prosperity, on resilience to outside influence, and on innovation and technological growth.

Energy policies influence the prices we pay, the quality of the air we breathe, how we heat our homes, and the way we move around our cities and countries.

This truly is a topic that impacts us all in profound and fundamental ways.

That is why the United States' National Security Strategy sets a priority on promoting energy security, advancing technological improvements in the energy sector, and ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable energy.

Here in North Macedonia, our Embassy has consistently highlighted the linkages between the country's energy sector and broader priorities, including U.S. strategic interests in the region.

Our aim is to help North Macedonia and its neighbors create a stronger, more diversified energy sector, reducing dependence on malign actors and vulnerability to external shocks. This increases economic stability and competitiveness as well as energy security, both of which make the country a more reliable partner.

First, diversification reduces dependence on any one source. A 2014 study found North Macedonia to be among the five European states most vulnerable to a shut-

off of Russian natural gas, due to its complete dependence on Gazprom. Unfortunately, not much has changed since then, and other countries in the region are also still heavily dependent on Russian gas and thus vulnerable to its coercion.

During his visit to North Macedonia, just last month, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Energy Frank Fannon told the media he was confident this region could move away from its complete energy dependence on the East. And having been here for about 16 months now, I am encouraged by the political will within the government to diversify energy supplies and ensure long-term energy security.

Second, diversification will further connect North Macedonia with the region, both lowering costs for consumers, and opening trade routes deeper into Europe. The government has expressed a strong commitment to build a gas interconnector with Greece, and that's a step in the right direction. We urge both countries to move quickly to overcome any barriers to this deal.

North Macedonia's strategic location and connection to Greece via pipeline would open opportunities to transport natural gas to neighboring Kosovo, Serbia, and Albania, allowing those markets to also benefit from low-cost natural gas. And there are many other projects in the works to help ensure stability of supplies and further connect the region.

Finally, diversification will ultimately lead to cleaner energy generation by reducing the use of more polluting technologies and creating opportunities to share the benefits of cleaner ones. Innovations in renewables are transforming the sector in ways that just a short time ago was unimaginable. In the last ten years, the United States has significantly changed its energy generation mix to become a major player in clean energy.

I was pleased to hear about North Macedonia's government plans to gradually move away from coal-fired facilities, ensuring half of the country's electricity generation capacity comes from renewables by 2024. That will have a measurable impact on the air quality.

These are just a few of the benefits North Macedonia and the region stand to gain by diversifying the energy sector, and the United States stands ready to be a 'co-investor' in North Macedonia's and the region's success.

With this, the countries of Southeast Europe, including North Macedonia, have an opportunity to increase connectivity across Europe, playing a significant role in the

broader picture of European energy access and security, and bringing the economic and security benefits of new energy sources to the rest of their European neighbors.

This conference is a big step in that direction and toward a brighter and more connected future for North Macedonia and the region.

I wish you a very productive conference.

Thank you.