

*International Energy Charter Expert Meeting, Tirana, 13 July 2016*

Dear Minister Gjiknuri, dear ladies and gentlemen,

“Like food and water, energy is a basic human need. People can use it for heating, cooking, transport, proper healthcare and telecommunications services. Energy is, literally, the fuel of economic development. It is an alarming fact that today billions of people lack access to the most basic energy services. To create and sustain prosperity, we need stable, sustainable, reliable and affordable energy, with full access for every human being.” About a year ago Minister Kamp, the Dutch economic and energy minister, said this in The Hague, where countries were gathered for the signing of the new International Energy Charter. In fact, the Netherlands was the founder of its predecessor, the European Energy Charter, signed in 1991.

The International Energy Charter reflects the globalisation of the energy market by enlarging its own base. It deals with future energy challenges, like making energy supplies more sustainable. It also focuses more on the two billion people who still lack access to electricity. Because we can only solve these problems by making massive investments in energy generation, transport and distribution. By signing the new International Energy Charter Treaty governments equipped themselves to create the enabling conditions for more private sector investment in energy. Not only in fossil fuels, but also in green energy and energy networks. This will help the economy grow and meet society's need for energy security.

It is clear that the public and private sector need to cooperate closely to attain this goal. We will all need to diversify our energy mix. This is true for every country on its own, but it makes sense for countries to cooperate and create regional markets. In the Netherlands we say ‘it is better to be close to your neighbour than to have a far away friend’. And in fact, our most important trade partners are our direct neighbours Germany and Belgium.

As the Dutch ambassador, I am of course pleased that the Netherlands and Albania have an intensive cooperation in the field of energy. In the field of oil exploration, gas infrastructure with the assistance of our national gas company Gasunie, as well as in sustainable energy, Dutch, international organisations and Albanian companies are increasingly working together. Also cooperation on capacity building of energy and tax regulations, one of your topics for today as well, is part of it. Aligning regulations to the EU acquis and international standards is high on the agenda here.

Welcoming you to Tirana, I would like to mention one other development with regard to Albania. It also has to do with increasing standards. The judicial reform that we are all awaiting is crucial for this country to raise its economic potential and create a stable investment climate. Companies, including energy companies, need to be sure that when they have a problem they can go to court and get it dealt with in a proper way. I am therefore convinced that voting for the judicial reform, hopefully later this month in parliament, will make a crucial difference for Albania and its partners.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Western Balkan countries in the region have a common EU accession ambition that brings them closer together. And there is no need to wait for more cooperation amongst themselves. The so-called Berlin process has not only led to an important increase of political contacts, but is also leading to concrete steps for cooperation in the field of energy. Trading energy will increase security of supply for the region. Last week in Paris during the Western Balkans meeting, Commissioner Hahn underlined the importance of aligning energy ambitions and working on soft measures that increase interconnectivity in the region. That is indeed what the EU will invest in. You are here today to discuss just that: transit issues and possibilities for harmonisation of regulations.

I would like to wish you a very successful meeting.

Dewi van de Weerd

Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands