



IPTO is connecting Greece's grid to those of neighboring countries



Gastrade's Alexandroupolis floating storage and regasification unit

A green energy hub in the making

At the centre of a rapidly changing energy landscape, Greece aims to position itself as a leading supplier of renewable energy

From harnessing the power of wind and the sun to opening new liquefied natural gas (LNG) facilities and installing high-voltage undersea power cables, Greece is diversifying its energy supply and increasing domestic production.

These projects come as Greece continues to reduce the European Union's reliance on Russian gas and undertakes one of the most ambitious climate change agendas in the economic bloc. Last year, 57% of the country's electricity mix was supplied by wind, solar and hydroelectric facilities, whereas the Mediterranean nation plans to entirely phase out all coal-powered elec-

THEODOROS SKYLAKAKIS
MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

"Greece has the biggest potential for offshore wind in the whole Eastern Mediterranean."

tricity by 2028 and reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. It is a hugely ambitious target, but the EU's need for energy diversification has been accelerated due to the war in Ukraine; while Greece is, in parallel, betting that a carbon-free future can reshape its economic destiny.

"Greece is important as it is an entry point for LNG for the whole Southeastern European region, and potentially also an entry point for electricity coming from outside Europe from the Middle East and North Africa," explains Theodoros Skylakakis, Minister of Environment and

Energy. "We will also play an important role in the next 15 years in regards to offshore wind, because Greece has the biggest potential for offshore wind in the whole Eastern Mediterranean."

One company playing a major part in helping transform Greece into a strategic regional gas hub is Gastrade, which became the country's first private company to receive an independent natural gas system license from the state. This led to the successful opening of the Alexandroupolis floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU), a LNG terminal that will have a maximum sustainable regasification capacity of 5.5 billion cubic meters a year.

"The objective of the FSRU is to provide diversification of supply and routes of energy to the wider regions of the Southeastern region from Greece all the way to Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria," states Kostis Sifnaios, Managing Director at Gastrade. "This is a project which is part of a wider program called the Vertical Corridor Initiative, which aims to provide energy and gas now, and hydrogen in the future, from south to north. We believe that Greece, through Gastrade, can enhance its role as a regional gateway for energy and LNG through the existing terminal at Alexandroupolis and through a second terminal that has been licensed."

Currently working under the National Energy and Climate plan, which was first introduced in 2019, the government hopes to speed up its energy transition away from oil and toward gas and renewable sources. Bidding to become an energy hub for the entire region, renewable energy is set to play a central role in the years ahead. "Greece possesses an excellent dynamic of renewable en-



Theodoros Skylakakis
Minister of Environment and Energy



Manousos Manousakis
Chairman and CEO IPTO



Kostis Sifnaios
Managing Director Gastrade



John Karydas
CEO for Renewables Copelouzos Group

ergy potential due to its geographical location and its high-capacity factories, solar radiation and wind. Besides that, recent changes in the regulatory framework that the government has made present ideal momentum for investing in the local renewable energy sector," explains John Karydas, CEO for renewables at the Copelouzos Group.

KOSTIS SIFNAIOS
MANAGING DIRECTOR, GASTRADE
"Greece, through Gastrade, can enhance its role as a regional gateway for energy."

One of the most ambitious projects in Greece's green energy transition is the GREGY Project, which will see a submarine electricity cable with bi-directional power transmission carry electricity from Egypt's renewable energy sources to Greece. This will in turn benefit consumers and businesses in the country and in neighboring European nations. "GREGY is a visionary project that was conceived back in 2008 and has been included in the first Projects of Mutual Interest list of the EU," outlines Karydas. "It has the ability to produce 3,000 MW of green energy, which

can replace about 4.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 10 million tons on an annual basis. It's a very strong instrument for achieving independence from fossil fuels, independence from Russian natural gas, tackling the climate crisis and supporting the achievement of the green transition targets of Europe."

Another project of substantial significance is the Great Sea Interconnector, which aims to connect the national electricity transmission networks of Cyprus, Israel and Greece via undersea cables. The project will bolster energy security and facilitate the exchange of electricity between the participating nations.

"We own 100% of the whole Great Sea Interconnector project, which began in October 2023," comments Manousos Manousakis, chairman and CEO of the Independent Power Transmission Operator (IPTO). "Energy would primarily be exported from Greece toward Cyprus and Israel. It is geopolitically important for the EU, as Israel will then be technically connected to the European system. We have also signed a memorandum of understanding to form a company that will study a possible interconnection between Greece and Saudi Arabia. This kind of interconnection is important for the stability of the system and for the security of the power supply."

High-caliber projects across sectors

The development of infrastructure in Greece has shifted up a gear, with many world-class schemes under construction and in the pipeline

Greek infrastructure development has undergone a swift uptick in the last decade, with the US Department of Commerce estimating that the sector grew by 4.3% in 2023 and will expand by another 4.1% this year.

Future prospects for infrastructure and construction are also promising, according to Manolis Sigalas, senior vice president and managing director, Europe at Hill International, the US-headquartered global project management and construction consulting firm that is part of the Global Infrastructure Solutions family of companies:

"Projects of global caliber have commenced and there's a strong pipeline of projects that can be funded and implemented. That's reflected in the backlog of the big contractors, which has tripled compared to 2019 and will continue to increase."

One of the US's top-ten firms of its type, Hill International is active in 42 countries and has had a presence in Greece since the 1990s. However, it was in 2011 — midway through the nation's financial crisis — that its Greek operations became a major focus for the company.

"We deeply believed in the country's growth potential and the quality of its professionals in our sector and we saw a window of opportunity. Greece had established financial agreements with



Manolis Sigalas
Senior Vice President and Managing Director, Europe, Hill International

the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank, a key element of which was a far-reaching privatization program," reveals Sigalas.

"The premise of our strategy was that investors implementing large capital expenditure programs would require robust management, combining international best practices and service levels with locally available technical skills and talent. Our commitment to the country was rooted and solidified during those difficult times. We never pressed the 'eject' button to abort our mission and we're very pleased our efforts came to fruition."

Today, Hill International has a specialist team of 300 employees in Greece, he adds. "Our Athens office is now the headquarters of our European operations, which reflects Greece's capabilities, especially in professional services."

Inside the country, the firm is currently working across the infrastructure, buildings, energy and data center sectors, where it is acting as project manager, independent engineer or leading technical consultant, among other roles. "We're involved in distinctive projects of global status, such as the \$2.5-billion phase one of The Ellinikon, the \$2.0-billion Athens Metro extensions, the \$500-million Stavros Niarchos Foundation Health Initiative, the \$500-million



Komotini combined cycle gas turbine power plant

MANOLIS SIGALAS
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND MANAGING DIRECTOR, EUROPE, HILL INTERNATIONAL
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Heraklion International Airport in Crete, the \$350-million Port of Piraeus capex program, the \$200-million redevelopment of the Four Seasons Astir Hotel in Athens and several other transformational projects," he states.

The company is also contributing its expertise to many of the smaller-scale infrastructure

projects taking place in areas such as airports, motorways, health, water, waste and power. A significant number of these are financed by the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Facility and aim to bolster crucial economic sectors like tourism.

"Tourism is not just about developing 5-star hotels. You need to have the backbone infrastructure in place to support a holistic growth plan for Greece's tourism and safeguard the end-user experience," explains Sigalas. "Every project, large or small, is extremely important to Hill International, as it's a piece of the puzzle of growing investment activity in the country. Greece has come a long way in the past decade and literally shifted gears in recent years. As a US firm with a global footprint and strong bonds with Greece, we're delighted to see the nation evolving."

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