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Europe enters winter with historically low storage levels, reinforcing the need for LNG imports and storage flexibility

Brussels, 9 October 2026 – Europe's gas infrastructure is entering the winter with sufficient flexibility to meet demand under a range of conditions. But with underground gas storage at historically low levels and uncertainty around LNG availability, the margin for manoeuvre will be tighter this winter, Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE) said today, following the publication of the ENTSOG Winter Supply Outlook 2026/27.

EU underground gas storage facilities were 72% full on October 1, around 11% below the level recorded at the same time last year and equivalent to approximately 74 bcm. Storage covered around 26% of EU gas consumption during winter 2025/26, underlining the important role it continues to play in keeping the European gas system balanced through the winter.

The outlook confirms that Europe's gas infrastructure can respond to a range of supply and demand conditions. At the same time, the picture becomes more challenging if the winter is colder than expected, LNG availability is constrained or supply disruptions occur. In these circumstances, demand response or potentially uncovered demand emerges in a number of the scenarios assessed.

Lucie Boost, Secretary General of GIE, said:

"Europe is going into this winter with a resilient and highly interconnected gas infrastructure, but with less gas in storage and less room for error. The message from ENTSOG's outlook is quite clear: if we face a cold winter and LNG supplies are tight, the pressure on the system increases quickly and demand response can become necessary. And if we draw storage down too far this winter, we also make it harder to prepare for the winter that follows."

"That is why we need to make full use of the flexibility available across the system. Storage is particularly important when demand changes quickly, allowing gas to be withdrawn during cold spells and periods of peak consumption. LNG, meanwhile, diversifies supply and provides access to global gas markets, helping meet demand and preserve storage inventories where sufficient supplies are available. Transmission networks connect these different sources of supply with consumers across Europe. "

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Low starting storage puts a premium on flexibility

Europe entered the winter with around 811 TWh, or 74 bcm, of gas in underground storage, compared with approximately 940 TWh, or 85 bcm, on 1 October 2025. There are also significant differences between regions, with storage levels in the North-Western region comparatively low at the beginning of this winter.

The outlook therefore points to the merit of continuing to inject gas into storage in October where possible, alongside close monitoring of storage levels and wider system conditions.

That matters because storage is much more than a source of gas at the start of winter. Its value lies in the flexibility it provides as conditions change, particularly when temperatures fall, and in the case of demand spikes or supply disruption. The ability to withdraw gas at short notice is especially important during cold spells and periods of peak demand, when changes in consumption cannot necessarily be matched immediately by additional LNG deliveries.

Market signals also matter. Low or negative summer-winter price spreads can weaken commercial incentives to inject gas into storage, even though adequate inventories provide an important safeguard against periods of high demand and supply disruptions. Ensuring sufficient storage levels and withdrawal capacity therefore remains an important consideration for Europe's wider security of supply.

Last winter, underground storage covered approximately 26% of total EU gas consumptions, compared to around 30% during winter 2024/25.

LNG will be critical to maintain the gas balance

LNG is expected to remain one of the main sources of gas supply to Europe this winter, accounting for approximately 40% of total supply under the LNG Optimal scenario. Norway accounts for around 27%.

Europe also has around 1,600 TWh per winter season, or approximately 145 bcm, of LNG regasification capacity. This infrastructure diversifies sources of supply and gives Europe access to global gas markets. Where LNG cargoes are available, it provides substantial supply flexibility, helping meet demand and preserve storage inventories as the withdrawal season gets under way.

However, the availability of regasification capacity alone cannot guarantee that the required volumes will be available. Europe remains exposed to developments in global LNG markets and

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competition for cargoes. Furthermore, while LNG deliveries are essential to maintaining the overall gas balance, they cannot necessarily respond immediately to sudden, temperature-driven increases in demand. This is where the ability to withdraw gas from storage becomes particularly important.

Under tight LNG supply conditions, ENTSOG estimates that storage could fall to 13% by the end of March 2027 under Reference Winter demand. Maintaining a 30% storage level at the end of the winter would require approximately 1,060 TWh, or 96 bcm, of LNG over the winter.

Strong LNG deliveries will therefore be important throughout the season, both to meet demand and to preserve storage inventories for periods when the system may be under the greatest pressure.

"It is not just about how much gas Europe has. It is also about whether that gas is available, when it is needed and where it is needed," said Lucie Boost. "LNG is essential to diversifying Europe's gas supplies and maintaining the overall gas balance. Storage provides a different but equally important contribution, allowing the system to respond to short-term changes in demand and helping manage periods of pressure, particularly towards the end of winter when inventories are lower. Both are essential to security of supply."

The outlook also points to greater challenges for landlocked countries in Central and Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe, where securing sufficient LNG deliveries can be more difficult. This makes continued coordination and cooperation between countries essential.

A cold winter would leave less room to manoeuvre

The Cold Winter scenarios provide a clear indication of where the pressure points could emerge.

Even under LNG Optimal supply, the analysis identifies demand response needs or potentially uncovered demand equivalent to approximately 7% of total Cold Winter demand, or 237 TWh (22 bcm). Under LNG Tight supply, this rises to around 12%, or 437 TWh (40 bcm).

At the same time, aggregate European storage falls to approximately 11% by the end of the winter in both scenarios.

The findings highlight why storage levels and withdrawal capability matter particularly towards the end of the winter. A two-week cold spell or a peak-demand day can quickly increase pressure on the system when storage inventories have already been drawn down and additional supply cannot necessarily be secured at short notice.

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"The most important point here is that storage needs to remain available when we need it most," said Lucie Boost. "A high storage level at the beginning of winter is important, but so is what remains in the tank towards the end of the season. Adequate stocks and withdrawal capacity allows the system to respond to cold spells and other periods of high demand, complementing the supply available through LNG and pipeline imports."

Security of supply is also about getting gas to where it is needed

The European gas system remains resilient overall, but the outlook identifies potential regional constraints. In particular, combinations of low storage, high demand and supply disruptions can create bottlenecks that limit flows towards Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

This is an important consideration as the European Union looks ahead to the revision of its Security of Supply framework.

For GIE, the discussion should not focus only on how much gas is available across Europe as a whole. It should also consider where that gas is located, how quickly it can be delivered and whether infrastructure can respond when several pressures occur at the same time.

"Security of supply is ultimately about having gas available when people and businesses need it, wherever they are in Europe," said Lucie Boost. "That means looking at the whole system: storage, LNG, transmission infrastructure and cross-border cooperation. The future Security of Supply framework should recognise the complementary role of these assets, including the flexibility storage provides and the contribution of LNG to supply diversification and the availability of gas across Europe."

This winter will also shape the next one

The outlook does not stop at March 2027. Its assessment of summer 2027 highlights how closely the two seasons are linked.

Starting from 72% storage on 1 October 2026, the European system can reach 90% by the end of September 2027 under Reference Winter demand and LNG Optimal supply. Under LNG Tight supply, however, available supply would be insufficient to reach 90%, with EU storage reaching only 65%.

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A very low storage position at the end of winter would make the task harder still. In other words, the decisions and market conditions of the coming months will have consequences well beyond March.

“Winter preparedness does not end when winter ends,” concluded Lucie Boost. “Where we finish this winter will directly affect how easily we can refill storage for the next one. Maintaining adequate storage levels, securing strong LNG deliveries and making full use of Europe’s interconnected infrastructure will be important not just for this winter, but for the resilience of the European gas system in the years ahead.”

GIE welcomes the ENTSOG Winter Supply Outlook 2026/27 as an important contribution to the continued assessment of Europe’s security of supply and the preparedness of the European gas system.

Who is GIE

Gas Infrastructure Europe (**GIE**) is the association representing the interests of European gas infrastructure operators active in gas transmission, gas storage and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) regasification. GIE is a trusted partner of European institutions, regulatory bodies and industry stakeholders. It is based in Brussels, the heart of European policymaking. GIE currently represents 72 member companies from 25 countries. GIE’s vision is that by 2050, the gas infrastructure will be the backbone of the new innovative energy system, allowing European citizens to benefit from a secure, efficient and sustainable energy supply.

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