

23rd GIE Annual Conference Infrastructure for a net-zero Europe

GIE Annual Conference opens in Ljubljana with a focus on Europe's overall energy infrastructure needs

Ljubljana, 22 October 2026 – How can Europe keep its energy supply secure while moving towards a net-zero energy system? This question will be at the heart of the 23rd Annual Conference of Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE), which opened today in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Hosted by Slovenian gas transmission system operator Plinovodi, the conference brings together policymakers, infrastructure operators and industry representatives for two days of discussion on the challenges facing Europe's energy system and the infrastructure needed to address them.

Under the theme "*Infrastructure for a net-zero Europe*," the programme looks at the practical questions behind Europe's energy transition. How can gas, electricity and hydrogen networks work together more effectively? What role will storage and LNG continue to play in securing supply? And how can existing infrastructure adapt as renewable and low-carbon gases become more widely available?

"Europe needs to look at its energy infrastructure in the context of how the entire energy system is changing. Security of supply remains essential, but so does the ability to accommodate new energy sources, connect markets and respond to changing demand. Getting the planning and investment framework right will be crucial if we are to make progress on decarbonisation without losing sight of affordability and competitiveness," said Arno Bux, President of GIE.

The opening session features contributions from Céline Gauer, Director-General of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Energy, and Tomaž Žagar, State Secretary at Slovenia's Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy. Their contributions will set the scene for discussions on the policy decisions shaping Europe's energy infrastructure, including the development of the gas and hydrogen markets and the EU's plans to improve coordination between energy networks.

Director-General Céline Gauer commended the conference programme for covering a wide range of important topics related to the role of gas infrastructure in the energy transition. During her keynote speech, she highlighted how gas infrastructure provides alternatives when Europe needs them most, notably through the rapid development of new routes, flows, and infrastructure during

the energy crisis. "A common challenge going forward is proposing an energy mix, while making it affordable," said Ms Gauer. She also stressed that diversification is essential, while noting that it cannot make Europe immune to instability. Looking ahead, she identified three key elements for the evolution of the energy system: "security, resilience and sustainability". While recognising that Europe's electrification rate continues to progress, Ms Gauer emphasised that it is not a complete solution or a silver bullet. Instead, she underlined the need for a combination of solutions and resources. She further highlighted the importance of more integrated gas and electricity systems, including common risk assessments and cross-border solidarity.

For Slovenia, the discussions also reflect the importance of regional connections and cross-border cooperation.

"Energy infrastructure is built for decades, not just for today's needs. Slovenia's strategic position gives us both an opportunity and a responsibility to strengthen the connections between European energy systems. As energy sources and supply routes evolve, we must ensure that infrastructure planning reflects not only our long-term ambitions, but also the real needs of industry, the economy and security of supply. Bringing Europe's energy leaders together in Ljubljana is an opportunity to turn these challenges into practical cooperation and investment," said Matija Bitenc, General Manager of Plinovodi.

"The energy transition must be technologically realistic and economically sustainable, while ensuring security of supply. Our responsibility as policymakers is to create predictable conditions for investment and enable industry to remain competitive throughout this transformation. This requires stronger European cooperation, a balanced approach to different energy technologies and investment frameworks that work for all Member States, including smaller markets," said Tomaž Žagar, State Secretary at Slovenia's Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy.

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.

Who is Plinovodi

Plinovodi is Slovenia's gas transmission system operator, responsible for the safe, reliable and efficient operation of the national gas transmission network. Through its cross-border connections, the company plays an important role in ensuring Slovenia's security of energy supply and its integration into the European gas market. By strengthening regional connectivity and cooperation with neighbouring transmission system operators, Plinovodi supports the development of a secure, flexible and increasingly decarbonised European energy system.

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