Japanese LNG buyer seeking price arbitration in possible 'bellwether'

An effort by a Japanese company to get lower prices on a liquefi ed natural gas contract signed a decade ago could be the first in a fl ood as buyers seek relief from legacy contracts amid cheaper spot supplies, according to an analyst at Credit Suisse Group AG. "This will prove the bellwether for more arbitrations and tougher LNG buyer negotiating stances across the market," analyst Saul Kavonic said in an e-mail. "We expect other traditional LNG buyers to quickly follow suit." The market will be awaiting what concessions Osaka Gas Co will be able to wrest from the marketing unit of the Exxon Mobil Corp's PNG LNG project. They entered into arbitration after a dispute during a price review, a spokesman for the Japanese fi rm said Friday, adding that the company is seeking to lower LNG costs. Exxon declined to comment. The dispute underscores the frustrations of buyers locked in contracts linked to oil benchmarks while spot prices drop to the lowest seasonal level in a decade. Most of Japan's LNG imports are indexed to oil, which has remained a widespread practice since its inception in the 1960s. Sinking prices have put LNG producers under intense pressure to off er better terms. Even Qatar, one of the world's largest suppliers, made a "dramatic" break from tradition by offering mid-term LNG contracts at about an 11% oil slope, compared to more than 16% on some contracts signed in 2008, Fereidun Fesharaki, chairman of energy consultant FGE, said in May. The Osaka Gas contract with the PNG LNG project was agreed at a 15% slope to the Japan Crude Cocktail and runs through 2035, according to data compiled by Bloomberg NEF. Prices in the utility's current PNG LNG contract are more than double those on the spot market and about 30% more than recently signed contracts, Kavonic said. A shift to a buyers' market has emboldened consumers that historically have been concerned about security of supply to seek greater contract fl exibility and lower prices. "It's unprecedented for a traditional LNG buyer to initiate arbitration in this way, presenting a new paradigm for LNG contract negotiations," said Kavonic.

Turkey May Rethink Boeing Plane Orders, Erdogan Says

Turkey’s president said his government may have to “rethink” existing orders for Boeing Co. airplanes worth about $10 billion, in comments that reflect the country’s strained ties with the U.S.

Turkey’s hesitation on the Boeing order adds to tension created when the country ordered a missile defense system from Russia, spurning an offer for Ankara to buy U.S. air-defense missiles.

“I’ve told Mr. Trump in Osaka that even if Turkey’s not buying Patriots, it’s buying Boeings. We’re good customers,” President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Friday in Ankara, referring to Raytheon’s Patriot systems. “But if it goes on like this, we’ll have to rethink about this issue.”

Erdogan spoke with U.S. President Donald Trump at the G-20 summit, during which he reminded him of existing orders for 100 Boeing jets by Turkish Airlines, the nation’s flagship carrier where the government holds a 49% stake. Turkey has since begun receiving the S-400 missile defense systems from

Russia, which the U.S. has long said is incompatible with the its role as a NATO member and purchases of U.S. F-35 fighter jets.

Turkish Airlines in March 2018 said it'll buy 25 of Boeing's 787-9 jets, scheduled for delivery by 2023. In 2013, it had announced a decision to purchase 75 of the 737 MAX jets, the grounded airplanes involved in two fatal crashes. Five of these were delivered in the first quarter this year, with the rest set to be delivered by the end of 2023.

Bank of England to Hold Rates as Clouds Gather Over Outlook

Bank of England officials will probably keep policy on hold next week as they acknowledge that the economic outlook has worsened materially since May.

All but one of the 24 economists surveyed by Bloomberg predict a unanimous vote to maintain the benchmark rate at 0.75%. The risk of a no-deal departure from the European Union under new Prime Minister Boris Johnson and an increasingly gloomy global outlook suggest that policy makers will be cautious.

Officials have scaled back their rate-hike rhetoric and investors are increasingly pricing in rate cuts as the risk of a disorderly Brexit grows.

But with a falling pound and stronger wage growth threatening to fuel inflation, officials potentially face a dilemma. Governor Mark Carney is expected to address the trade-off between growth and prices after the BOE publishes its quarterly Inflation Report, alongside the monetary-policy decision, at noon on Thursday.

Economists are virtually unanimous in predicting the BOE will cut its 2019 growth forecast, with around half predicting a downgrade to the following two years. Officials are also widely expected to hike their inflation projections.

Policy makers have softened their language about the possibility of interest-rate increases. Michael Saunders, who led the charge for the BOE's last two rate hikes, has suggested he's in no rush to begin another push, telling Bloomberg the economy right now is "clearly not overheating."

Chief Economist Andy Haldane, also considered among the more hawkish members of the Monetary Policy Committee, said in a speech this week that the case for keeping policy unchanged is strong and the group should proceed with caution on any loosening.

Carney has also warned that damage to the global economy from rising protectionism could be significant and require a major policy response.

While one economist sees a dissenter on the nine-member rate setting committee calling for an immediate cut, most recent comments point to unanimity.

Officials may try to address the discrepancy between their official forecasts and market expectations. Carney has said they will explore “how best to illustrate” the market “sensitivities.”
Source: Bloomberg

France aims for US digital tax deal by late August – minister

France wants to reach a deal with the US on taxing tech giants by a G7 meeting in late August, Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire said Saturday.

He was responding to US President Donald Trump, who on Friday vowed “substantial” retaliation against France for a law passed this month on taxing digital companies even if their headquarters are elsewhere.

The law would affect US-based global giants like Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, among others.

‘Foolish’ Emmanuel Macron

Trump denounced French President Emmanuel Macron’s “foolishness”, though they discussed the issue by phone on Friday, according to the White House.

Le Maire told a news conference Saturday: “We wish to work closely with our American friends on a universal tax on digital activities.

Inspired by”We hope between now and the end of August – the G7 heads of state meeting in Biarritz – to reach an agreement.”

Leaders of the Group of Seven highly industrialised countries are to meet in the southwestern French city on August 24-26.

Le Maire emphasised that “there is no desire to specifically target American companies,” since the three-percent tax would be levied on revenues generated from services to French consumers by all of the world’s largest tech firms, including Chinese and European ones.

The law aims to plug a taxation gap that has seen some internet heavyweights paying next to nothing in European countries where they make huge profits as their legal base is in smaller EU states.

Raising a glass

In a move that’s rattling the industry, President Trump responded to the French plans by threatening to raise tariffs on French wine. French vintners sold 1.6 billion euros worth of wine last year to American consumers.

Trump derided French wines in a tweet, and later said he might hit them with retaliatory tariffs to French. He made a similar threat last year.

About 20% of French wine is sold in the US, and the Federation of French Wine and Spirits Exports on Saturday expressed concern about tariffs that could hurt “French players in this market, but also their clients and American consumers.”

The federation urged French and American authorities to pursue dialogue on the tax issue, expressing hope “that they can quickly find a path to follow to prevent these threats from materialising.”

Le Maire said the US “should not mix the two issues,” and noted that European wines already face tariffs in the US as do American wines in Europe.

Trump insisted Friday that he has a good relationship with Macron and had just spoken with him.

After initially befriending the US president despite their starkly different worldviews, Macron has increasingly stood up to the impulsive, America-first Trump on trade, climate change and Iran’s nuclear program.

The tech tax is just their latest battleground, and will be a key tension point when the two men meet at a Group of Seven summit in France next month.

France failed to persuade EU partners to impose a Europe-wide tax on tech giants, but is now pushing for an international deal on it with the G7 and the 34 countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

France has said it would withdraw the tax if an international agreement was reached, and Paris hopes to include all of the OECD countries by the end of 2020.

Chevron wins 90-day Venezuela waiver despite opposition

Bloomberg/Houston

Chevron Corp and four oil services companies won a last-minute US government reprieve to continue producing oil in Venezuela, albeit only for a 90-day period.

The US Treasury Department supported Chevron's request to extend its sanctions waiver by six months, but the majority of other government agencies involved opposed any extension at all, a senior administration official told reporters on a call on Friday. President Donald Trump backed a compromise between the two positions, resulting in the three-month time period.

The extension allows San Ramon, California-based Chevron to essentially keep the lights on and the facility running, but another extension will be harder, the official said.

The company has operated in Venezuela for almost a century, since the discovery of the Boscan field in the 1920s. It has outlasted many other oil companies, including Exxon Mobil Corp, which left after a series of industry nationalisations during Hugo Chavez’s tenure as president.

The US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control said in a statement Friday that Chevron can continue its joint venture with state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela SA until October 25. The previous waiver was due to end yesterday.

Oilfield service companies Schlumberger Ltd, Halliburton Co, Baker Hughes and Weatherford International Plc were also allowed to continue their work in Venezuela for three months.

Chevron closed 1.5% lower in New York, at $123.72.

It’s a partial victory for Chevron that leaves the Trump administration with the option of pulling the company out later this year. The impact of any eventual refusal of a Chevron waiver is rising as other production falters, giving the company a bigger and bigger size of the market in the country, the official said.

“Our advice to Chevron would be to start preparing to leave after October,” Joseph McMonigle, an analyst for HedgeEye Risk Management, wrote in a note. “We are highly doubtful there will be another extension granted.” While Venezuela only accounted for 1% of Chevron’s global crude production last year, it remains strategically important as home to the world’s largest oil reserves. As the only US major still in the country, it could be first in line for any investments under a new government.

“Our operations in Venezuela continue in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations,” Chevron spokesman Ray Fohr said in an e-mailed statement.

In recent months, Chevron made the case to the Trump administration that if it were to leave, its Venezuelan assets could easily be turned over to another operator with little effect on overall production. That could mean the state, or even Russian or Chinese interests would benefit.

The ruling “does indicate Chevron has the ear of key government officials,” said Muhammed Ghulam, a Houston-based analyst at Raymond James & Associates.

Venezuela has seen its oil output drop precipitously in recent years. Production is currently below 800,000 barrels a day, down from as much as 3.71mn in 1970, according to data from the oil ministry. At least half of that oil is produced by joint ventures with foreign companies.
Chevron’s joint ventures with PDVSA produce more crude in Venezuela on average than those with other companies – including China National Petroleum Corp and Russia’s Rosneft Oil Co The US producer only receives a portion of that supply, however, amounting to about 40,000 barrels a day from its Venezuelan affiliate in 2018.
The US has refused to recognise Nicolas Maduro as Venezuela’s president after an election last year. Sanctions have become its main tool for depriving Maduro of cash and pressuring the military to turn against him.
Earlier this week, Venezuela’s opposition-led National Assembly issued a decree that guaranteed Chevron’s assets in the country would be protected under a new government led by Juan Guaido.
Oil purchases from Venezuela have become complicated since the US expanded its sanctions regime to include any business done with PDVSA, as the national oil company is also known. Other companies, including Spain’s Repsol SA and Italy’s Eni SpA, continue to do business with Venezuela.

Sasol’s SA plants threatened by emission standards

Sasol said some of its South African plants are under threat from sulfur dioxide emission standards that it will need to comply with by 2025.

The company, South Africa's biggest by revenue, operates plants that convert coal into motor fuel and chemicals in Secunda, east of Johannesburg, and Sasolburg to the south. Flue-gas desulfurisation equipment needed to cut emissions of the gas, which causes acid rain and a range of health complications, is too costly and technically difficult to install, Sasol said.

Globally, as well as in South Africa, the company produces a range of chemicals.

Air pollution in the area around coal-fired plants operated by Sasol and Eskom east and south of Johannesburg rivals levels in some of the most polluted cities on earth. The government has proposed doubling the new limit, but is coming under increased pressure to act against the two companies as it's being sued by environmental activists over the breach of current emission limits.

Sasol will have to comply with new sulfur dioxide emission limits for coal boilers of 500 milligrams of the pollutant per normal cubic meter. Its 2018 emission reports show that some equipment at both Secunda and Sasolburg regularly exceeds 1 000 milligrams.

“The new plant standard for sulfur dioxide will pose a compliance risk challenge for Sasol post 2025 from both a technical and financial feasibility point of view,” the company said in an emailed response to questions. “All commercially available technologies for the abatement of sulfur dioxide to meet new plant standards have been evaluated and we continue to scan for new technologies.” A failure to comply could lead to fines and the closing of plants.

While Sasol has already won a postponement, Eskom is yet to hear whether its applications to have its compliance with the sulfur dioxide emission standards delayed from 2020 until 2025 are successful. It has argued that it would only be economic and feasible to fit the pollution abatement technology on its two newest plants.

Eskom, which operates about 15 coal-fired power stations, has said that flue-gas desulfurisation equipment can cost between R20bn and R40bn per plant. Environmental activists including Greenpeace put the cost significantly lower.

“Sasol is still saying they can’t afford flue-gas desulfurisation,” said Robyn Hugo, program head for pollution and climate change at the Cape Town-based Centre for Environmental Rights. “Sasol itself has confirmed that there are no other means to meet these minimum emission standards.”

In addition to being technically difficult and costly, flue-gas desulfurisation equipment would require that additional water and limestone are brought in from the Northern Cape province. Existing limestone mines in that province are 450 kilometers (280 miles) to 800 kilometers away from Sasol’s plants.

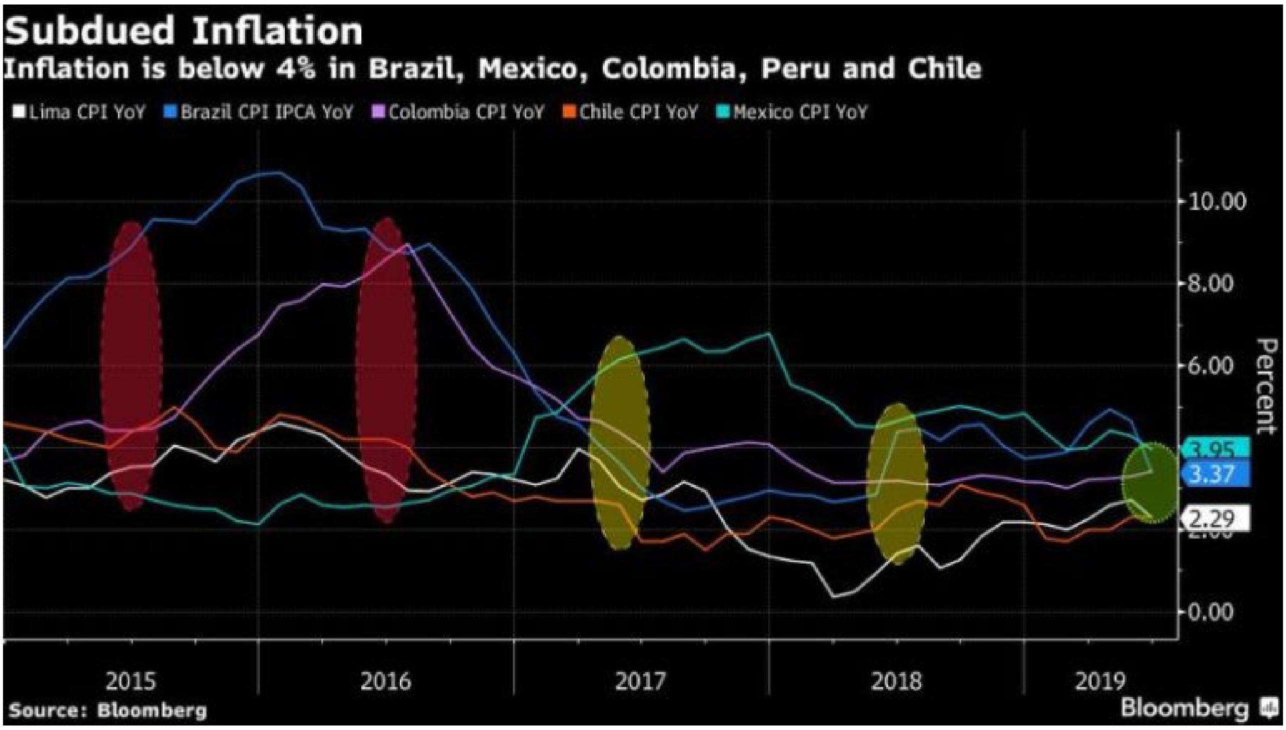
“Flue-gas desulfurisation technology is proven,” Sasol said. Still, “it would be significantly challenging to retrofit” the equipment at the existing plants, it said.

In a separate application for a delay in meeting emission limits for a range of other pollutants, Sasol has asked for permission to significantly exceed caps for nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter and carbon monoxide until 2025. By that time, it says in the application, new equipment should enable it to comply.

On incinerators at its Secunda plant, it wants limits of as much as 90 times the new cap to be applied for carbon monoxide and particulate matter.

Sasol shares have declined by 27% this year as the company battles cost overruns at its Lake Charles chemicals project in Louisiana.

The world economy’s biggest week of 2019 as Fed prepares cut



There will be no chance of a summer break for investors or policy makers in coming days as they brace for what might be the busiest week for the world economy this year.

The highlight is Wednesday's decision by the Federal Reserve with markets and economists virtually united in predicting Chairman Jerome Powell and colleagues will cut interest rates for the first time in more than a decade.

What's Likely to Happen?

Some Fed watchers predict officials will cut their benchmark by half a percentage point, but the signal is that they will eschew a bigger move in favor of a quarter point reduction. They will likely also leave open the possibility of further action down the road as they seek to sustain the record-long U.S. expansion and kick start inflation.

> *"While the Fed cutting rates by a quarter point will hardly be a surprise to financial market participants — as it has been well advertised and is priced in with a relatively high probability — the broader question will be how the Fed telegraphs its intentions regarding additional easing," said Carl Riccadonna, chief U.S. economist at Bloomberg Economics. "Policy makers are keen to avoid getting 'bullied' by the*

> *markets into more than 50 to 75 basis points of rate reductions."*

The Fed isn't the only event with the ability to shape the outlook for the global economy this year.

On Monday, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin are set to travel to China for for the first high-level, face-to-face trade negotiations between the world's two biggest economies since talks broke down in May.

Then on Friday, the monthly payrolls report will shed light on whether the Fed's move was necessary. Economists surveyed by Bloomberg predict a 166,000 gain in non-farm jobs in July, slower than the 224,000 of June.

If that's not enough, Bank of Japan policy makers meet on Tuesday amid calls to reinforce their commitment to low rates and Brazil's central bank may cut rates on Wednesday. Thursday sees the release of global manufacturing data amid concerns many industries are already suffering recession.

Here's our weekly rundown of other key economic events:

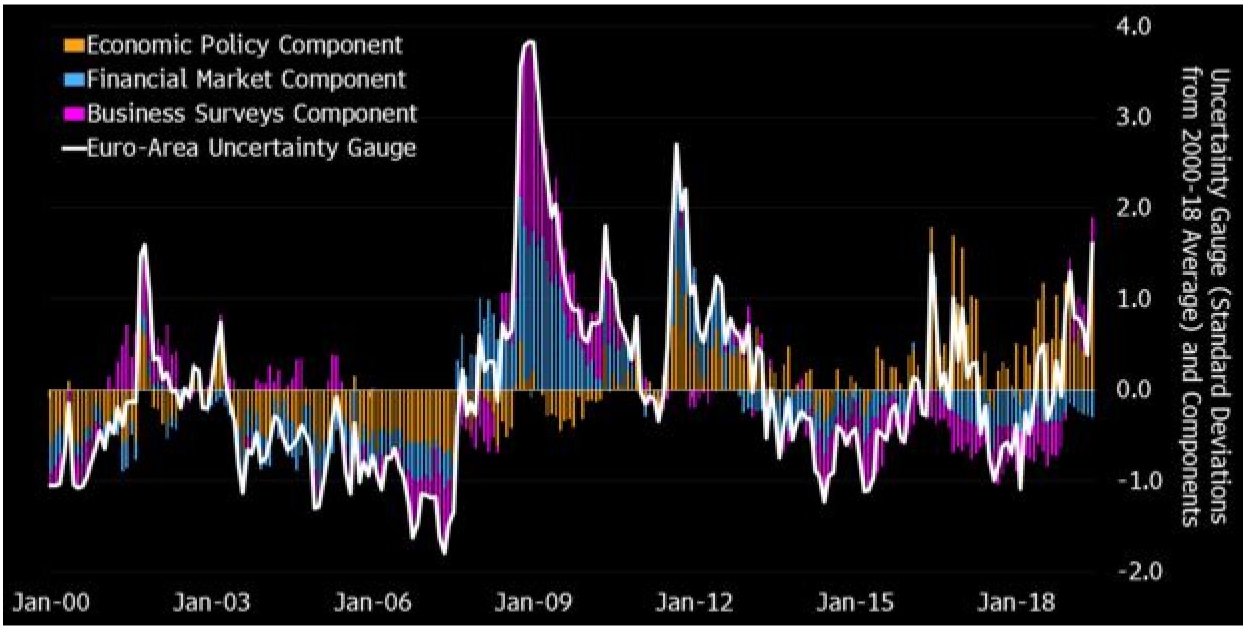
U.S.

As Fed officials begin their discussions on Tuesday they will have some more data with which to assess the economy. Personal income, pending home sales and consumer confidence statistics are all due that morning. Then on Thursday, the ISM manufacturing report is expected to show industry is stabilizing and continuing to expand. Friday's trade data will be pored over for evidence that the skirmish with China is having an effect. Also next week, the Treasury will say on Wednesday how much money it needs to borrow amid rising budget deficits.

Europe, Middle East and Africa

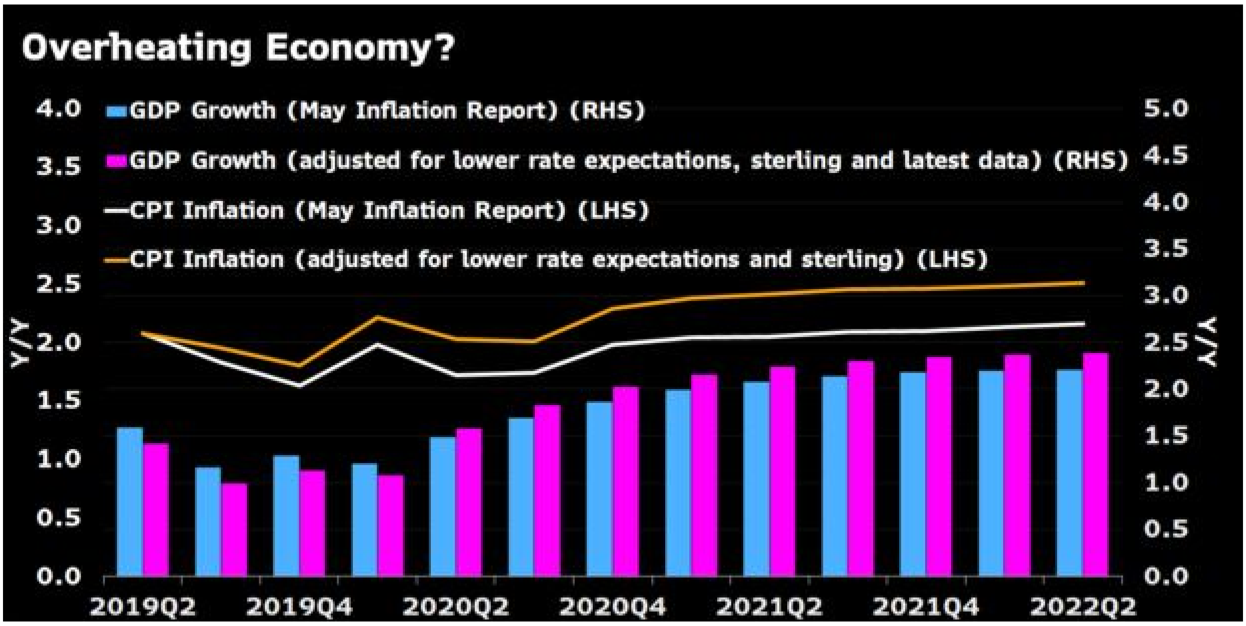
It’s a big week for data after European Central Bank President Mario Draghi last week paved the way to cut interest rates in September and perhaps relaunch bond-buying. Tuesday is set to witness another decline in euro-area confidence while the following day is likely to confirm that the economy slowed in the second quarter to half the pace of the 0.4% of the prior three months. Inflation data the same day is expected to show consumer price growth languishing well below the ECB’s target of just below 2%. Thursday sees the release of purchasing managers indexes.

New Uncertainty Gauge Shows Damage to Euro-Area Economy



Source: Bloomberg Economics

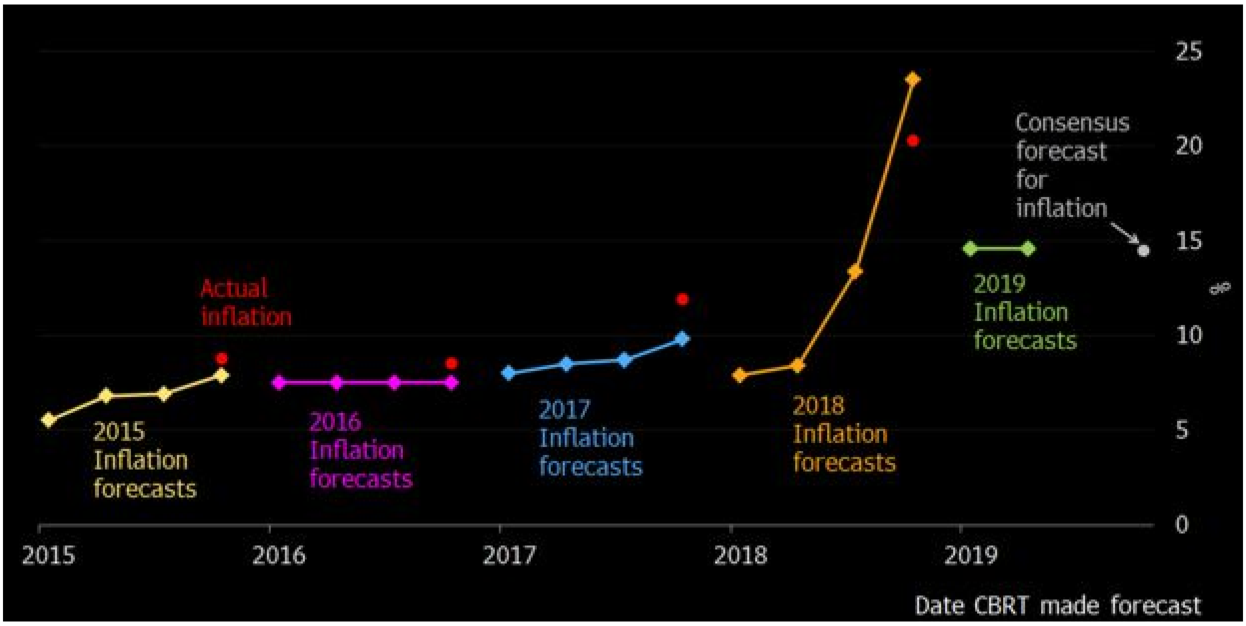
In the U.K., the Bank of England publishes its latest forecasts on Thursday with Bloomberg Economics reckoning it will turn more dovish as the Oct. 31 Brexit deadline nears. The Czech central bank is predicted to leave its benchmark unchanged at 2% on Thursday.



Source: Bank of England, Bloomberg Economics

Turkey's new Central Bank Governor Murat Uysal will face public questioning for the first time on Wednesday when he presents the quarterly inflation report. The lira was relatively unscathed after a 425-basis-point interest-rate cut at his first meeting, the largest in recent Turkish history, investors will be curious as to whether he shares President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's unconventional belief that high interest rates cause inflation. Banks across the Persian Gulf region will probably move to ease if the Fed cuts as expected.

Turkish Central Bank's Inflation Forecast in Line With Consensus



Source: CBRT, Bloomberg

Asia

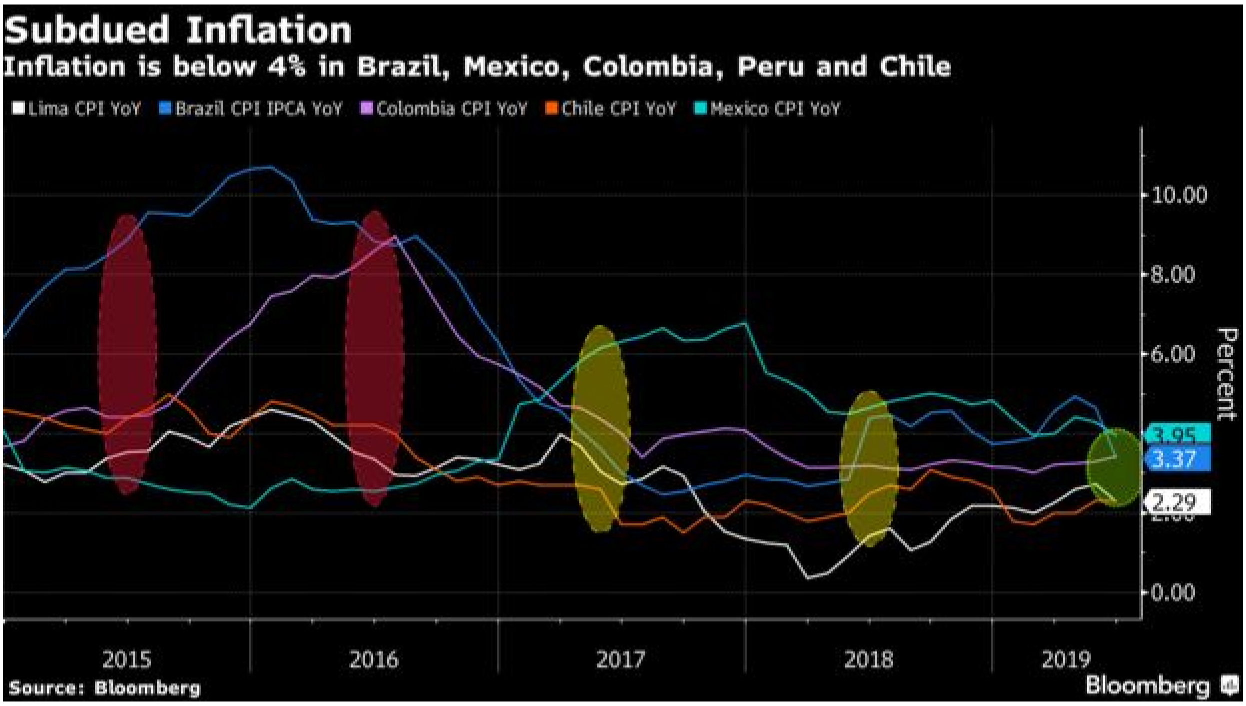
Bank of Japan policy makers finish a meeting on July 30. About a third of economists in a survey published last week said they expect policy makers to strengthen their pledge to maintain rock-bottom interest rates rather than do nothing and risk a sharp appreciation of the yen should the Fed cut rates. Still, some officials see little to be gained from such a tweak, according to people familiar with the matter. Data released on Tuesday is forecast to show industrial production shrank again in June amid weak external demand.

Easy Does It

In China, Bloomberg Economics says purchasing managers' indexes will probably remain in contractionary territory as pressure on exporters persist. Elsewhere, a report on Thursday is set to show South Korean exports slid for an eighth straight month which will unnerve those already worried about global trade. Inflation data for Australia, Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand will help inform central bankers.

Latin America

Brazil’s central bank is widely expected to cut borrowing costs on Wednesday with economists and traders debating how deep it will go. The following day, July industry output data may shed light on whether Latin America’s largest economy slipped into technical recession in the first half of the year. Mexico will learn if it was able to avoid a technical recession on Wednesday, when the national statistics bureau releases preliminary output data for the second quarter.



First Annual Eastern Mediterranean Energy Leadership Summit

Interest in the Eastern Mediterranean has increased during the last years with the discovery of major gas fields such as Tamar, Leviathan and the giant Zohr field in Egypt. These have opened up major opportunities for new discoveries, but also for oil and gas investments in the region.

The **First Eastern Mediterranean Energy Leadership Summit** will be held at the **Divani Apollon Palace & Thalasso** in Athens, Greece, from **October 1 – 2, 2019**. The event is organized by the Transatlantic Leadership Network, the University of Piraeus – MSc in Energy: Strategy, Law & Economics of the Department of International & European Studies, and SGT S.A.

Held at the Ministerial level, the Summit will gather together senior government officials and business executives from the energy market to identify crucial opportunities and challenges for continued commercial and geopolitical cooperation. Invited countries include the United States, members of the Three Seas Initiative, and countries surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean Region. During the conference diverse thoughts, ideas and best practices will be presented on how Eastern Mediterranean countries can best take advantage of their geographical positions and exploit available energy resources to secure a more reliable, self-sufficient and environmental sustainable energy supply.

Download Summit Details

Topics of discussion:

- The Future of Oil & Gas in the Eastern Mediterranean: Alternative Scenarios and Policy Perspectives
- Security Dimensions of Transatlantic Energy Cooperation: The Effects on the Eastern Mediterranean
- Opportunities for Energy Cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean: Project View
- Building a Framework for Regional Energy Cooperation and Integration
- Energy Developments in South East Europe. The Challenge for the Region
- Market Trends: Predicting Winners and Losers
- Regional Electricity Market Dynamics
- Investment Outlook: Required Financial Resources and Remaining Challenges
- Removing Barriers and Exploiting Opportunities

SPEAKERS

Kocho Angjushev

Deputy Prime Minister
Republic of North Macedonia

Enver Hoxhaj

Deputy Prime Minister
Republic of Kosovo

Francis R.Fannon

Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Energy Resources
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Mirko Šarović

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South EU summit to focus on migration and energy

The fifth Southern EU countries (MED7) Summit which will convene on January 29 in Nicosia will discuss migration, Brexit, eurozone reform, Europe’s energy security, climate changes and the 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

The states participating in the summit are France, Spain, Portugal, Malta, Italy, Greece and Cyprus.

Ahead of the summit, President Nicos Anastasiades will hold bilateral meetings with the prime minister of Portugal Antonio Costa – who is arriving on January 28 for an official visit to Cyprus – and with French President Emmanuel Macron and Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte.
Speaking during a press conference on Wednesday, Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides underlined the importance of the summit, adding that discussions will focus on issues which concern the EU.

Christodoulides also described Anastasiades’ bilateral meetings with Costa, Macron and Conte as very important, adding that a lot of issues of mutual interest are expected to

be discussed.
Responding to questions about the energy issues, Christodoulides said that with energy companies Total and ENI actively participating in operations in Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone possible expansion of their operations was likely to be one of the issues discussed during the bilateral meetings which Anastasiades will have.

Referring to the issue of Europe`s energy security, Christodoulides said the seven countries would discuss how the EU can enhance its energy autonomy and independence.

With regard to Anastasiades' meeting with Macron he noted that when the foreign minister of France Jean-Yves Le Drian visited Cyprus in September, the two countries agreed to begin discussions on concluding bilateral agreements on energy, defence, security and other issues.
Responding to a question about Brexit, the foreign minister said that the EU27 have a common approach on this issue.

"We are following developments in Britain very closely. The issue is continuously being discussed at the European level and it is very important that the EU27 have a common approach on it," Christodoulides stressed.

To another question about the different approach of France and Italy as regards the migration issue, Christodoulides said that migration has a bigger impact on the EU Mediterranean countries than on the other EU member states, and the aim of the discussion that will take place is to outline very concrete suggestions and positions.

‘2019 Should Be the Year of Change – and A Change We Deliver’: An Interview With Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades

On the occasion of the 5th South EU Summit – taking place today in Nicosia – the President of Cyprus provided an exclusive interview,

highlighting the importance of 2019 for the future of the European Union, the role of Southern Europe in catalysing a reform agenda, while emphasizing the increasing relevance of Cyprus in the attainment of EU energy security and climate targets.

South EU Summit: You assumed your duties as President of Cyprus on the 1st of March, 2013 – only a few days before the climax of the financial crisis in the country. Now, in your second term, not only has the island-nation made a smooth exit from its bailout programme, Cyprus returned to investment grade in 2018, and is currently one of the fastest growing Member States in the eurozone (with a 4% GDP growth rate). What were the keys to achieving this feat, and what measures do you believe need to be prioritized to continue building confidence and credibility in the Cypriot economy?

President Anastasiades: During the past few years, we have succeeded in turning an economy in distress into a story of strong economic recovery, that gained international praise.

The positive repercussions of an ambitious reform programme, and the careful management of state finances, are being reflected through, among others: successive budget surpluses, a dynamic growth rate of 4%, a drastic reduction in unemployment, consecutive upgrades of our economy by international rating agencies, as well as a significant reduction in taxation.

At the same time, despite the economic difficulties we have faced, our country’s comparative advantages not only remain intact, but have been further enhanced and expanded. These include one of the most competitive corporate tax rates, a significant network of Agreements for Avoidance of Double Taxation, a highly qualified and professional workforce, and a fully EU harmonised tax and legal system.

The combination of the above, in conjunction with the reforms in the public sector, and the enhancement of the tax and legal frameworks, resulted in renewed substantial investments in a wide range of sectors.

From the operation of oil and gas giants in our Exclusive Economic Zone, to the licensing of the first integrated casino resort (with an investment of more than half a billion euros), an impressive 18 per cent annual increase in the registration of investment funds, the record numbers of the tourism industry in both arrivals and revenue, and the commercialization of the Limassol port, it is evident that our efforts have borne fruit.

The challenge now is to keep up the momentum and ensure that Cyprus remains on a path of sustainable growth. Sound governance of public finances, complemented by a business-friendly investment environment, a comprehensive government strategy for investment facilitation, and continuing to invest in education, research and development, entrepreneurship, and the empowerment of our youth, are critical elements on this path.

To this end, maintaining the reform momentum is imperative. The entire planning for the years 2018-2023 is a continuation of everything we achieved during my first term in office. With this in mind, we will continue consultations with the parliamentary parties, with a view to gain their support for our reforms programme, in the fields of public service, education, health, the judiciary system, research and innovation, and e-governance.

We also aim to continue with the policy of tax reductions, and provide new incentives in order to further boost entrepreneurship and attract new investments, with emphasis placed on innovation and start-ups. The new Investment Law to fast-track licensing procedures for large investments, and the establishment of a new enhanced investment funds framework, are crucial steps in this direction.

At the same time, the newly-established Deputy Ministry of Shipping, offers substantial support and attention to the already thriving maritime sector of Cyprus, and we have no doubt that the Deputy Ministry of Tourism, operational since January 1st of 2019, will further enhance the growing tourism industry.

Most importantly, we will continue to invest in our people, and work with determination and passion to drive change, progress, and prosperity in our country.

South EU Summit: Deepening the Economic and Monetary Union is a critical step towards greater integration at a eurozone level. What measures do you believe need to be prioritised at an EU policy level, leveraging on Cyprus' experience, to safeguard the country – and the eurozone – from future headwinds?

President Anastasiades: Without a doubt, we, the Member States of the Economic and Monetary Union, have come a long way in further deepening and strengthening the architecture of this relatively young structure.

Actually, this year only marks the Eurozone's 20th year of existence.

Mediterranean states have significantly contributed to this effort; we have taken part in long, sometimes difficult debates, on how to best promote the reform of the euro area. We have done so always in a constructive spirit.

As we all acknowledge, there are still a number of open issues that we need to discuss and decide upon, on which compromises have to be made, from all sides. At the end of the day, the further deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union shall, and will bring benefits to all its members, regardless of their geographic position.

Important issues ahead of us include the establishment of a central stabilisation function, in order to cushion Economic and Monetary Union countries from large and asymmetric macroeconomic shocks.

Advancing on the design and gradual implementation of a budgetary instrument, for convergence and competitiveness of the euro area, remains a priority. We stand ready to pursue the discussion within the eurozone towards a stabilisation function in the Euro area as well.

Concerning the Banking Union, significant progress has been achieved, in risk reducing measures for the banks. It is now time to move on with more concrete actions, and timelines, in regard to risk sharing measures, including the establishment of a European Deposit Insurance Scheme, so as to provide protection to depositors, regardless of the geographic location of deposits.

South EU Summit: Cyprus is the host of the fifth South EU Summit since its launch in September 2016, bringing together 7 governments that jointly represent close to 40% of EU GDP and population. What is the purpose behind this gathering, and what results would you like to see come about?

President Anastasiades: I am certain that we all agree that this year, 2019, will be a defining year for Europe; this year the legislative programme of the last five years is coming to an end; starting in May, with the European elections, we are opening the cycle of institutional changes; in May, we, the EU leaders, are also called on to set out our strategic vision for the EU, and provide an answer to our citizens' legitimate concerns; in two months' time, we need to be ready to move forward as a Union of 27. Our actions this year will count more than ever.

Europe is facing all sorts of challenges – social, economic, environmental, political threats and security issues, challenges that touch upon the life of our citizens.

European citizens look to us, politicians, for answers to their daily problems; they demand the bettering of their living conditions; they ask for security, tighter control of our borders, and appropriate measures against migration; they seek a bold approach to a changing environment, the impacts of which, we in the Mediterranean feel the most. Our citizens have every reason to turn to their leaders, and the Institutions, expecting solutions to their problems, and the conditions for a more stable, safe and prosperous future.

So, 2019 should be a year of change, and a change we deliver, it should be our defining moment; that we, as the European Union, do more in answering our citizens through targeted and visible actions. We have a historic responsibility to do so, through a calibrated, ambitious, and result oriented strategy, that will put the European project back on track; make it relevant; adapt it to modernity.

We, the Mediterranean states, have common concerns, and we are determined to pursue fair and well-designed policies, for the benefit of Europe and our citizens. Change and progress are both possible if there is vision, determination, leadership, cooperation, and coordination. I have no doubt that all these elements exist, and we can take the Union one step further, for the benefit mostly of the Europeans. That is the reason and purpose of our gathering.

South EU Summit: It is widely accepted that Cyprus cannot reach its full potential without a reunification. Besides reducing the political risk of the country, there are estimates that suggest that the reunification of the island could triple the Cypriot economy's growth rate. You recently expressed your commitment to resume "a creative dialogue" to reach "a settlement that brings peace and stability" to Cyprus. Further to the stalemate in Crans-Montana, how do you propose to move forward on the Cyprus issue, and what type of solution to you envisage?

President Anastasiades: I cannot stress enough, the significance, and the consequent multiple benefits, that the solution of the long-lasting Cyprus problem, and the normalisation of our relations with Turkey, would bring about.

In this regard, with a renewed mandate from the people, my top priority remains none other than addressing the unacceptable current state of affairs, with the continuing Turkish occupation of 37 per cent of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, since there is no doubt, that lasting peace and stability can only be achieved through the comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus Problem.

To this end, on numerous occasions, I reiterated in the clearest terms to the UN Secretary-General, our partners in the EU, the Permanent and non-Permanent Members of the Security Council, and the international community in general, that I remain strongly committed to resuming the negotiating process.

What is of course required, is to create the necessary conditions, that will allow the dialogue to resume, on the basis of good will, and a constructive stance from all stakeholders, particularly from the Turkish side, in order to safeguard the positive outcome of the negotiations.

The above-mentioned were repeatedly reiterated during my meetings with the UN Secretary-General, during which I also stressed, that I remain sincerely committed to negotiate a solution within the framework set out by the Secretary-General, as clarified on July 4, 2017, with the same determination and positive attitude we have demonstrated since the beginning of the dialogue.

Currently, we expect the arrival of the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General, who has already held two separate meetings with all parties involved, with the aim of agreeing on the “Terms of Reference”, as regards the methodology of a new negotiating process.

Within this context, I do hope that the meetings of the special envoy of the United Nations, which will soon take place with all other interested parties and stakeholders involved, will allow the Secretary-General to be in a position to resume negotiations.

Taking this opportunity, I wish to state that the failure of the Conference on Cyprus in July 2017 was precisely due to Turkey’s insistence on its long-standing position, in maintaining the continuation of the anachronistic system of guarantees, the unilateral right of intervention, and the permanent presence of Turkish troops.

I also wish to state that our side submitted comprehensive written proposals for each and every one of Mr. Guterres six-point framework, including on a new security architecture that would replace anachronisms, and the strategic aspirations of third countries against Cyprus.

Having said the above, at the same time, we should also not ignore the remaining significant differences on the other chapters of the Cyprus Problem. Differences that can be easily resolved, by adopting and respecting what is considered as our obligation: The European acquis.

It is only through adhering to these fundamental principles, which determine that a member-state of the United Nations, and the European Union, can only be considered as truly independent and sovereign, if it is free of any third country dependencies, that we can truly establish the conditions for prosperity, and peaceful co-existence between all the citizens of Cyprus, in an environment of safety and stability.

I truly wish that both our Turkish Cypriot compatriots, and Turkey, will respond positively to the new prospect that is unfolding again upon us, taking into account, in a comprehensive manner, and without being selective, the provisions set by the Secretary-General at the Conference in Crans-Montana.

On my own behalf, I wish to reassure, once again, my determination to work tirelessly to reach a comprehensive settlement, that will finally reunify our island after 44 years of division, ensuring conditions of safety for the future generations of Greek and Turkish Cypriots, without any third country military troops or guarantees.

A settlement that will satisfy the genuine desire of our people, especially of the younger generations, to live together and peacefully co-exist, collaborate and prosper, in a European country which fully respects their fundamental human rights and freedoms.

And, aside from the obvious fact that the solution of the Cyprus Problem, would be first and foremost to the benefit of all Cypriots, please allow me to bring to your attention some other merits that a settlement would bring:

- On a regional level, it would turn Cyprus into a model-country of stability and predictability, and would amplify Cyprus’ role as a security provider, in one of the most turbulent areas of the world.

- At a European level, it would end the oxymoron of having one of its member-states being divided, while it would also positively reinforce EU-Turkey relations, and the overall security architecture of the EU.
- Last, but not least, the solution of the international problem, which has been on the agenda of the United Nations during the last decades, will offer a beacon of hope, that even the most intractable problems can be solved peacefully, through the United Nations.

South EU Summit: Establishing a united strategy to manage migratory inflows currently constitutes one of the biggest challenges for the EU writ large. In fact, in 2018 Cyprus ranked 1st in asylum claims per capita, with close to 6,000 requests. What is your perspective in this regard, and how can the Union strike a balance between upholding EU founding values, such as solidarity, while safeguarding the interests of European citizens? What reforms to you believe should be made to the EU's Common Migration Policy?

President Anastasiades: Last December, at the European Council, we discussed once more the implementation of the EU's comprehensive approach. We had a rather heated discussion, I would say, during which I intervened three times.

We have been striving for months to come to a satisfactory solution to the migratory pressures we are faced with. Since the beginning of the crisis, several measures have been adopted, producing positive results; we welcome these, but there is still work to be done, especially on fair burden sharing, and shared responsibility among Member States.

What do we actually need in the end, in order to come to a lasting solution?

First, solidarity: front line states cannot be left alone anymore, to bear the responsibility of hosting, and providing adequate reception conditions, to the immense flows of asylum seekers, while other Member States provide only financial and technical assistance. Nor can the EU be dependent on the goodwill of certain third countries, to cooperate, and to carry out their obligations.

Second, measures concerning border control, or prevention of human trafficking and smuggling. The present crisis has an important humanitarian dimension that cannot be overlooked.

Third, effective cooperation with third countries, based on equal partnership, and mutual honouring of respective obligations.

Cyprus has been facing disproportionate pressures from asylum seekers during the last years. We are the first among Member States concerning the number of first time asylum applications in relation to the population. There is a 55 per cent increase for 2018, compared to the same period last year.

Since the beginning of 2018, we have registered the illegal entry of more than 1,840 persons into the areas that are under the effective control of the Republic. The main point of their departure remains Turkey and, recently, to a lesser extent, Lebanon (204 persons since the beginning of 2018).

Irregular migrants entering Cyprus are mostly Syrians, who are entitled to international protection, and cannot be returned. Hence, measures mainly focused on the management of flows of economic migrants, cannot help Cyprus.

There is also a high percentage of economic migrants whose return is not feasible, because Turkey does not apply the EU –Turkey Readmission Agreement towards Cyprus, (and does not apply the third country nationals clause towards any Member State).

Last but not least, the refusal of Turkey to properly implement the EU–Turkey Statement towards Cyprus, and prevent new migratory routes from emerging, aggravates the situation, since a considerable number of irregular migrants arrive in the areas that are not under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus.

South EU Summit: Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Israel are at the forefront of re-designing new energy routes running through the Eastern Mediterranean. Besides the EuroAsia Interconnector, an EU decision regarding the EastMed pipeline is expected within the first months of 2019. Likewise, international attention is set on the results of the exploratory drilling being undertaken by ExxonMobil. What is your evaluation of the potential of Cyprus becoming a decisive player within the context of EU energy security, and how can these cross-border energy projects contribute to the strengthening of EU energy independence?

President Anastasiades: Energy security is of strategic importance for the EU, as it underpins not only our economic growth, but also our ability to alleviate poverty and improve social welfare. Most importantly, of course, it safeguards our ability to make political decisions, based solely on our code of principles, free of undesirable interdependencies.

The European Union has faced challenges in the past, that have illustrated the need to ensure that it is not over-reliant on a limited number of sources of energy, or be vulnerable to external pressure. Diversification of energy resources, and routes, is thus of paramount importance in ensuring secure, sustainable, affordable, and safe energy supply to Europe.

In this respect, I welcome the special attention paid by all to the Eastern Mediterranean, as a region that can become a reliable energy supplier, thus contributing substantially to the EU’s energy security.

Towards this end, we are actively working on the EastMed

Pipeline Project, an ambitious project of great geopolitical significance, that will transfer Israeli and Cypriot resources to the EU, via Greece and Italy. We hope that the Intergovernmental Agreement that has been negotiated between Cyprus, Greece, Israel, and Italy, will be signed as soon as possible.

In the same vein, the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement between Cyprus and Egypt last September, concerning the construction of an underwater pipeline, to export Cypriot natural gas to Egypt, the first of this kind in the region, is an equally important development, since the natural gas, through the Idku LNG plant, will be exported to the EU. In this respect, it has to be clear that the Government of the Republic of Cyprus is acting in the interest of all its citizens, Greek-Cypriots as well as Turkish-Cypriots, who will benefit accordingly.

All these developments highlight our firm conviction, that the wealth of the region can bring the countries of the region together, creating common interests, and contributing to peace and stability. In fact, it can become what coal and steel was for the EU, this time in a new regional context.

Unfortunately, Turkey, almost on a daily basis, continues to issue warnings and threats if we insist on proceeding with our energy programme. It is clear that Turkey’s actions in our maritime zones aim at advancing Turkey’s interests in the Eastern Mediterranean: to place the region’s hydrocarbon reserves under its control, and become the energy hub of Europe.

At the same time, Turkey’s behaviour poses a broader security threat in the fragile Eastern Mediterranean, and needs to be addressed, not only as a severe infringement of the sovereign rights of a Member State, but also of the rights and interests of the European Union as a whole.

Unqualified, tangible solidarity, is what is called for by the Treaties, and dictated by Turkey’s actions, and we need to send the message that Turkey needs to avoid any kind of friction, threat, or action, directed against a Member State, which damages good neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes

South EU Summit: Taking into consideration the need to shape domestic policies that comply with climate targets on the one hand (penetration of RES in electricity production equivalent to at least 32%, energy efficiency of 32.5% by 2030 and becoming the world’s first climate-neutral economy by 2050), guarantee the competitiveness of individual economies on the other, while also catering to the social implications derived from this energy transition – what is your strategy in this regard?

President Anastasiades: Let me start by underlining that the October 2018 report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the COP-24 deliberations are clear: climate change has emerged as the new major threat, especially for the Middle East and Northern Africa.

All countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Middle East, are particularly vulnerable. The forecasted impacts of a changing environment are dire for our region. They include social unrest, conflict, and mass migration, with serious ramifications for international peace, stability, and security.

We need to take immediate action at a national, regional, and an international level. There is no doubt about it.

The EU shall maintain its position as the global leader in the fight against climate change. Thus, we need to support the efforts of the European Commission in putting together the EU’s long term strategy, the soonest possible. A strategy that should be result oriented, and ambitious, with a vision for a climate neutral economy for the future.

Having in mind the worrisome outcome of the latest IPCC report, and other scientific studies, I convened a meeting last June, to evaluate and enhance Cyprus' action in combating the effects of climate change for Cyprus and the region.

Cyprus, due to its location, and its excellent relations with the countries of the region, can play an important regional role in tackling climate change and its impacts. Cyprus offers a particularly attractive institutional setting for a number of international organisations, looking for regional presence/headquarters.

Cyprus could promote coordination and cooperation, between the countries of the region, so that an Action Plan is developed; this will record and mitigate climate change impacts, on sectors like Environment, Agriculture, Tourism, Health, in Eastern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries. It will develop an inclusive "dialogue forum"- a platform where national and regional stakeholders, can discuss science-based practical solutions to challenges related to climate change.

The initiative could feed the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern region, with environmental observations and predictions required to assess the extent of the rapid warming and drying conditions, as well as better support national policies to meet CO2 emission pledges to the Paris Agreement.

In collaboration with advanced regional and international partners, who are experts in the field, efforts are currently underway to establish a new regional Centre of Excellence on Climate Change in Cyprus, being a knowledge hub for environmental and climate change research, and sustainable solutions, addressing the societal challenges of Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle Eastern region.