Malaysia expert calls for ‘clear, comprehensive’ national energy policy

A clear and comprehensive National Energy Policy (NEP) will serve a vital role in countries’ economic growth and energy transition, especially in the face of mounting uncertainties, a senior gas industry official from Malaysia has said.

Speaking at the 52nd edition of the GECF Gas Lecture Series, entitled ‘Collaborative Government-Association Synergy for a Sustainable and Vibrant Gas Industry’, Hazli Sham Kassim, president, Malaysian Gas Association (MGA), noted that Malaysia’s NEP is expected to be launched in the second half of 2021 with an aim to ensuring sub-sector energy development is aligned with the global energy transition trend.

“We anticipate that the National Energy Policy, currently undertaken by the Malaysian Government, will determine long-term strategies surrounding the national energy sector. It will address in depth cleaner energy sources including renewables and natural gas and ensure that all aspects related to the energy sector and environmental sustainability can also

be better addressed," said Kassim, whose association estimates that energy – precisely natural gas – contributes as much as 12% to the GDP of Malaysia, one of the 19 member states of the GECF.

"Natural gas will play an even more critical role in facilitating energy transition. We look forward to the completion of Malaysia's 'Natural Gas Roadmap' that we understand has been designed to optimise the value of indigenous natural gas resources, enhance security of supply through identifying new growth areas and at the same time ensuring a sustainable gas industry in Malaysia."

GECF secretary-general Yury Sentyurin noted that Malaysia, like many of the Forum's member countries from Russia to Qatar, is showcasing that only a holistic approach can address the three intertwined concerns of energy security, affordability, and sustainability.

"The road to recovery does not just depend on the outcome of the battle between the virus and the vaccines – it also hinges on how governments around the world deploy their policies and policy support to all economic sectors," Sentyurin said.

"This highlights the role of government-enterprise synergy to drive forward the agenda and shape opportunities."

Malaysia enjoys 42tn cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves that have enabled it to fuel its economic growth since the 1980s. Indigenous natural gas has also enabled Malaysia to become the fifth largest exporter of LNG, although in recent years the country has resorted to importing natural gas due to surging demand.

According to Kassim, as the cleanest fossil fuel, natural gas is expected to complement the growth of renewable energy. 2021 figures show that the contribution of combined gas and renewable energy in Peninsular Malaysia will increase by more than 11GW whilst coal will decline by more than 4GW by 2039. As a result, gas demand will increase threefold and carbon emission intensity from the power generation sector is set to reduce by more than 60% within the same period compared to the 2005 levels.

Opec+ sticks to plan to ease oil output cuts from May 1

Reuters/Dubai/Moscow/London

Opec, Russia and their allies will stick to plans for a phased easing of oil production restrictions from May to July amid upbeat forecasts for a recovery in global demand and despite surging coronavirus cases in India, Brazil and Japan.

The group known as Opec+ ditched plans to hold a ministerial meeting on Wednesday, four Opec+ sources said, following Tuesday's meeting of ministers who are members of a market monitoring panel.

The panel decided to stick to policies broadly agreed at a previous April 1 meeting of Opec+, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said after the talks.

He said the next Opec+ ministerial meeting was scheduled for June 1 to review output levels for July and August.

An Opec+ statement also confirmed the June 1 date for the next

meeting.
Opec+, which is responsible for more than a third of global production, has cut output by around 8mn barrels per day (bpd), equivalent to over 8% of global demand.
The reduction includes a 1mn bpd voluntary cut by Saudi Arabia. At the April 1 meeting, the group agreed to bring 2.1mn bpd back to the market from May to July, easing cuts to 5.8mn bpd.
In a report by Opec+ experts, the group forecast global oil demand in 2021 would grow by 6mn bpd, after falling 9.5mn bpd last year.
But the group said that, even though more than 1bn Covid-19 vaccine doses had been administered globally, it was concerned that surges in new virus cases in India, Brazil and Japan might derail recovering demand for crude.
Oil prices rebounded on Tuesday after falling the previous session, with gains capped by growing concern about fuel demand in India, the world's third-biggest crude importer.
The Opec+ report said it expected commercial oil stocks to reach 2.95bn barrels in July, taking them below the 2015-2019 average, and expected them to remain below that average for the rest of the year.
It said it saw stocks at about 70mn barrels below the average for the whole of 2021, a more optimistic outlook than its previous forecast of 20mn barrels below the average.

Getting to zero deforestation in the Amazon by 2030

Amazon deforestation in Brazil reached a 12-year high in 2020, and over 95 per cent of it is illegal. Governments and markets must radically revalue the rainforest’s natural services and stimulate a green economy to avoid a nightmare scenario.

The Amazon Basin is fast approaching an irreversible tipping point. That should concern everyone, because what happens in the Amazon has planetary implications.

Spanning eight South American countries and French Guiana, the Amazon contains over 60 per cent of the world’s tropical forests, 20 per cent of its fresh water, and about 10 per cent of biodiversity.

As a result of land speculation and insatiable global demand for meat, soy, gold, and other commodities, roughly 20 per cent of the world’s largest tropical forest has already been razed.

A further 5 per cent rise in deforestation levels could trigger catastrophic dieback, essentially dooming the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Some fear this process may already have started. The current prognosis is not good: Amazon deforestation in Brazil reached a 12-year high in 2020, and over 95 per cent of it is illegal.

Unless governments and markets radically revalue the rainforest's natural services, this nightmare scenario may be unavoidable.

Dieback in the Amazon Basin could release the equivalent of a decade's worth of global greenhouse-gas emissions. The forest would also lose its ability to absorb billions of tons of carbon dioxide, disrupting hydrological cycles, evapotranspiration, and ocean currents.

The agro-industrial sector could collapse, and the loss of biodiversity could be staggering. Hydroelectric facilities would be shuttered, declining water tables would make cities unlivable, and fisheries would become unviable.

Preventing this outcome requires achieving zero deforestation in the Amazon by 2030. And that, in turn, requires a clearheaded scientific assessment and science-based targets.

The Science Panel for the Amazon, a coalition of about 200 leading scientists from the region, should become permanent. And, given the extraordinary wealth potential of preserving the forest's biodiversity, the best way to protect this resource is by stimulating the emergence of a green economy.

For starters, this will require a crackdown on illegal deforestation and the networks that sustain it. Brazil's environmental enforcement agency, Ibama, handed out 20 per cent fewer fines in 2020 than in 2019, owing to funding cuts and reduced sanctions – and less than 3 per cent of fines are paid.

Reinforcing Ibama, a federal agency, is essential, as is bolstering state-level institutions on the frontlines of

environmental crime, such as police, firefighters, and land registration offices.

Illegal deforestation occurs in several ways, but typically involves unlawful land invasions, followed by forest clearance for commercial agriculture and ranching.

Another encroachment, wildcat mining, mostly for gold, undermines local ecosystems and human health, while wildlife trafficking, fueled by unrelenting global demand for rare birds, reptiles, and mammals, also affects forest health.

Currently, two-thirds of global supply chains have no policies on illegal deforestation. Massive investment in high-resolution remote sensing and artificial intelligence-based alert systems is essential, as is tracking illegally extracted commodities in global supply chains and strengthening investigation and prosecution.

One of the most important priorities in the Amazon is developing a transparent and accountable system that allows property titles and land demarcations to be registered and monitored properly over time.

Given the considerable fraud and corruption in most Amazonian countries' land registries, creating a digitised, accessible, and up-to-date ledger is critical to enforcing existing laws and stimulating legal markets.

Developing an online dispute-resolution process to address outstanding legacy litigation related to competing land claims is no less vital. And establishing a blockchain verification system for land registries to demonstrate a clear chain of ownership and custody, while difficult, would greatly improve the prospects for a green economy.

Another priority is accelerating reforestation and land regeneration. In Brazil, home to 60 per cent of the Amazon, the state of Pará is an obvious location for such efforts. In

Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, which together contain roughly 23 per cent of the Amazon, the states of Amazonas, Loreto, and Pastaza, respectively, stand out.

The key is to build a predictable pipeline of reforestation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable forest management projects that can scale rapidly.

The Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation initiative could accelerate funding for such efforts. International financing from the Amazon Fund, US President Joe Biden's administration, and tools such as green bonds would help, while local financing also could play a significant role.

So, too, could initiatives such as the Global Commons Alliance and 1t.org, along with investor activism, including from sovereign wealth and pension funds. In 2019, some 230 global investors, managing a total of more than $16 trillion in assets, called on companies to meet their deforestation commitments or risk adverse economic consequences.

Most important are innovations to bolster the green economy and support the communities that are the custodians of the Amazon Basin. Such initiatives could be accelerated by a Brazilian equivalent to the US government's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency to ramp up research and development, as well as related regulatory frameworks to enable an inclusive bioeconomy in the Amazon.

This approach would include applied research to collect and map Amazon biodiversity – with scientists studying fruits, nuts, plant extracts, and fibers, and using drones to sample biodiversity in hard-to-reach areas – along with digital platforms to secure biological assets for the public good.

To ensure that indigenous and local populations are included and benefit, clear and enforceable data-sharing rules and safeguards to promote local value creation and retention must

accompany these efforts. In addition, establishing low- and high-tech innovation hubs in selected countries can stimulate local innovation, harness traditional knowledge, and ensure local ownership.

Advancing the green economy and achieving zero deforestation in the Amazon will depend on the combined efforts of governments, the private sector, and civil society. In Brazil, several groups – including the Concert for the Amazon and the Brazilian Coalition on Climate, Forests, and Agriculture – are playing a pivotal role in shaping the agenda and connecting stakeholders. And with the country's federal government missing in action on this issue, local governments also are stepping up.

Concerted international and regional efforts – such as the Leticia Pact – combined with national and subnational interventions could create a brighter future for the Amazon. The health of the planet depends on it.

Robert Muggah, Juan Carlos Castilla-Rubio, and Julia Sekula contributed to this commentary.

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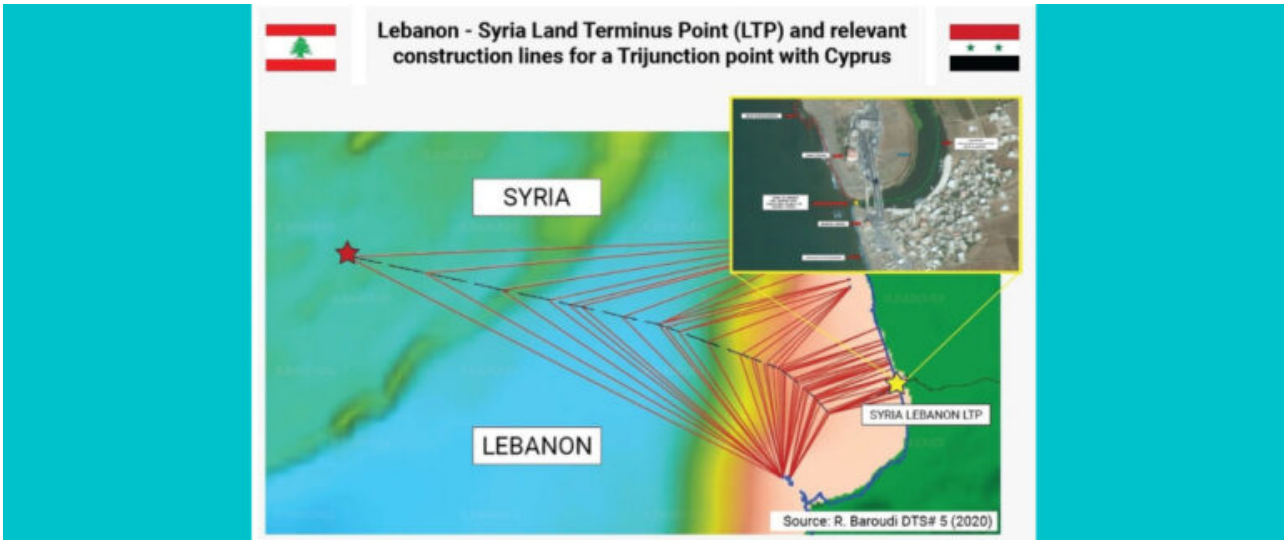
ترسيم الحدود البحرية اللبنانية – السورية على نار

حامية بارودي لـ"النهار": الحل التقني موجود وينطلق من نقطة الحدود البرّية



وضع لبنان الخطوط الاساسية لبدء عملية التفاوض مع الجانب السوري في ما يتعلق بمسألة ترسيم الحدود، وتحديدا البحرية منها، بعدما أظهر العقد الذي صادقت عليه الحكومة السورية في 18 آذار 2021 والموقع بين وزارة النفط السورية وشركة Capital Limited الروسية للتنقيب عن النفط والغاز شرق المتوسط قبالة ساحل طرطوس، عند الحدود البحرية اللبنانية – السورية، وتحديدا في البلوك البحري الرقم 1 في المنطقة الاقتصادية الخالصة السورية والتي تتداخل مع جزء كبير من المنطقة الاقتصادية البحرية اللبنانية.

بالفعل، يتداخل البلوك الرقم واحد بشكل كبير مع البلوك 1 والبلوك 2 ضمن المياه اللبنانية، وتراوح مساحة هذه الرقعة المائية ما بين 750 و1000 كلم2 تقريبا داخل المياه اللبنانية إستنادا الى تقارير وضعها الجيش اللبناني، ما أعاد تسليط الضوء على ضرورة الاسراع وفورا بالتفاوض مع الجانب السوري لإنهاء ملف ترسيم الحدود، اقله حاليا الحدود البحرية. هذه الحدود التي كان حددها لبنان في العام 2011 ضمن مرسوم تحديد المنطقة الاقتصادية الخالصة الذي لحظ إحداثيات النقاط الجغرافية للحدود البحرية والبرية، ورفضها الجانب السوري الذي تقدم بشكوى ضد لبنان أمام الأمم المتحدة في العام 2014. إعتمدت سوريا خطاً حدودياً بحرياً ينطلق من شاطئ طرطوس أفقياً نحو الغرب، الامر الذي اعترض عليه لبنان، مؤكدا ان

هذه الآلية تتعارض مع قانون البحار الدولي المعمول به من خلال الامم المتحدة والقواعد المعتمدة عالمياً لتحديد الحدود البحرية، وهي ايضا المقاربة التي يعتمدها لبنان في مفاوضاته مع الجانب الاسرائيلي لتحديد حدوده الجنوبية.

البعض طالب الحكومة اللبنانية بضرورة تقديم شكوى ضد سوريا امام الامم المتحدة إعتراضا على آلية ترسيم الحدود البحرية مع لبنان بطريقة أحادية والشروع بأعمال مسح وتنقيب عن النفط والغاز في منطقة متداخلة مع المياه اللبنانية، بعد تقديم اعتراض خطي أمام الحكومة السورية على ما تقوم به والاصرار على وقف الاعمال في المنطقة المتداخلة الى حين الانتهاء من ترسيم الحدود البحرية. ومن المهم أيضا ان تراسل الحكومة اللبنانية ممثلة بوزارة الطاقة والمياه الشركة الروسية المعنية لإعلامها بان الحدود البحرية اللبنانية – السورية غير مرسّمة نهائيا، وإرسال اي باخرة لتقوم بالمسح الجيولوجي ضمن المناطق المتنازع عليها بين لبنان وسوريا، يعرّض الشركة للملاحقة ويهدد مسار عملها، خصوصا في حال قرر لبنان الذهاب بهذا الملف الى المحاكم الدولية للفصل بالنزاع، وكذلك من الروسية توقيع Capital المهم ان تطلب الحكومة اللبنانية من شركة تعهد لدى الجانب اللبناني بان اي نشاط ستقوم به على البلوك السوري الرقم 1 سيكون خارج المنطقة البحرية المتداخلة بين لبنان وسوريا.

وقد كلف رئيس الجمهورية العماد ميشال عون رئيس الوفد اللبناني المفاوض لترسيم الحدود البحرية الجنوبية العميد الركن الطيار بسام ياسين تسلم زمام التفاوض ايضا مع الجانب السوري في مسألة ترسيم الحدود، على ان يقوم بالتواصل مع الجانب السوري لمعالجة ما يحصل عند الحدود البحرية، والاهم العمل على وقف أعمال الاستكشاف والتنقيب من قِبل الشركة الروسية التى لُزّمت العمل على البلوك 1 السوري، ضمن منطقة متداخلة مع البلوكات البحرية اللبنانية (1 و 2)، مع الاشارة الى ان طول الحدود البحرية بين سوريا ولبنان يبلغ نحو 53 ميلاً بحرياً، فيما يبلغ طول الحدود البحرية بين لبنان وقبرص 96 ميلاً، وطول الحدود البحرية اللبنانية – الاسرائيلية 71 ميلاً.

في هذا السياق، وانطلاقا من آخر التطورات على صعيد هذا الملف، يعتبر الخبير الدولي في شؤون الطاقة رودي بارودي ان "من المهم التأكيد ان سوريا ليست طرفًا في اتفاقية الأمم المتحدة لقانون البحار ولكنها دولة مراقبة، ومع الإعلان الأخير عن تلزيم البلوك

الروسية برز الكثير من المواقف "Capital" السوري الرقم 1 لشركة المتخوفة من التعدي على حقوق لبنان من قِبل سوريا، ولكن ما هو مؤكد ان البلوك السوري الرقم 1 يقع جنوب الخط الطبيعي الموقت المحايد بنسبة 100٪ إذا ما تم اعتماد قواعد الأمم المتحدة لقانون البحار. ومع ذلك، ووفقًا لمعلومات التنقيب العالمية حول مناطق امتياز النفط والغاز لعام 2018 و2019 و2021، لم تتغير اشكال البلوكات السورية، فهي واقعة لم تفاجئ متخصصي الصناعة النفطية، وهي اليوم كما كانت من قبل". ويشير بارودي الى ان "حدود سوريا القانونية البحرية وفقًا لجدول مطالبات الأمم المتحدة للعام 2011 هي كما يأتي:

البحر الإقليمي = 12 ميلا بحريا.
المنطقة المجاورة = 24 ميلا بحريا.
المنطقة الاقتصادية الخالصة = 200 ميل بحري.

فإذا نظرنا إلى البلوكات اللبنانية، نجد أنها تتداخل أيضًا مع البلوكات السورية".

وقّع لبنان وسوريا نحو 40 اتفاقا تتناول مختلف المجالات، ومنها ما يتعلق بتقاسم مياه الانهر المشتركة بين البلدين، سواء نهر العاصي او النهر الكبير الجنوبي. وامام هذه الوقائع ونظرًا للتداخل بين سوريا ولبنان، وعلاقاتهما الجغرافية والمعاهدات الموقعة بينهما، يمكن الدولتين، بحسب بارودي، وبسهولة رسم خط متساوي الأبعاد، وفقًا لنقطة الحدود عند نهاية البر (LTP Land Terminus Point) – الذي يلتزمه كلا البلدين كما هو ظاهر في الخريطة الرقم 1 بحيث يمكن الجيش اللبناني أن يحدد الخط الحدودي بدقة من خلال عمل دقيق ومحترف مع الجانب السوري، شبيه بالذي قام به خلال إعداد المفاوضات لترسيم الحدود البحرية اللبنانية في المناطق المتنازع عليها مع إسرائيل.

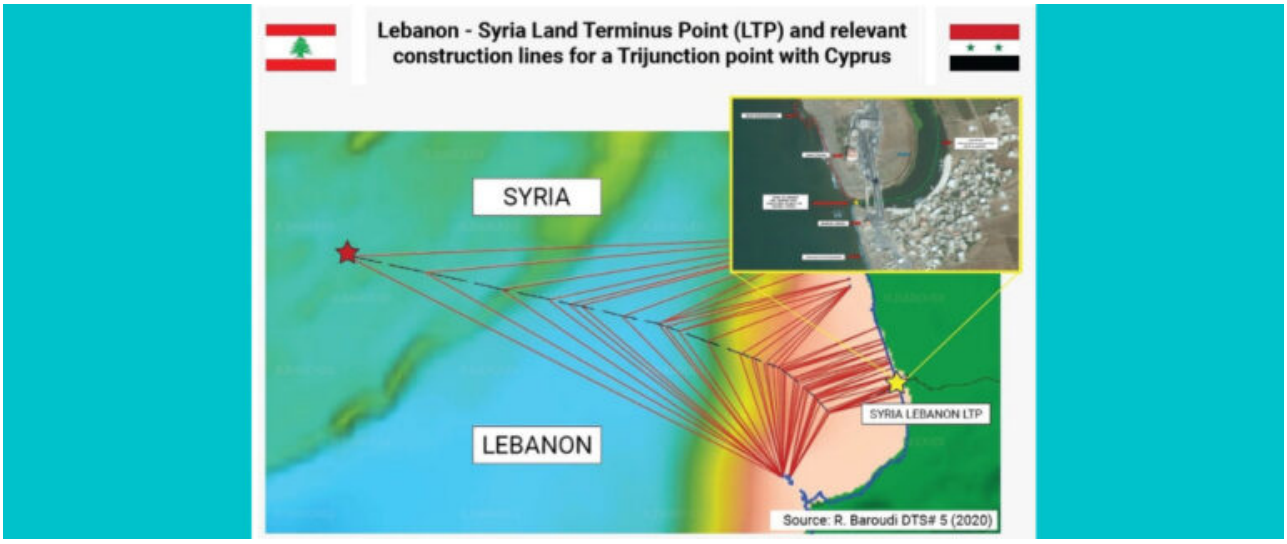
تستطيع الحكومتان اللبنانية والسورية حل الاشكال الحدودي البحري الذي يعتمد نقطة الحدود على نهاية LTP بشكل سريع طالما ان خط البر بين البلدين محدد والجزر قبالة البلدين محددة بشكل رسمي لا لبس فيه، وحل هذا الامر يؤسس لحل عادل وسريع لاشكالية ترسيم الحدود البحرية بين لبنان وقبرص نظرا لترابط الملفين. في هذا الاطار وطالما ان الموضوع يتعلق بقطاع الطاقة، ونظرا للوضع الصعب الذي يمر به لبنان من الناحيتين الاقتصادية والانسانية، فانه يتوجب بحسب بارودي على المعنيين اللبنانيين "التفاوض مع الجانب السوري وبشكل سريع لاعادة تفعيل القانون الرقم 509 الصادر في 16/7/2003 والذي

يجيز إبرام اتفاقية بيع الغاز بين لبنان وسوريا كما التواصل مع الجانب المصري لتنفيذ المرسوم الرقم 15722 الصادر في 14/11/2005، والذي أجاز بموجب مذكرة التعاون بين وزارة الطاقة في لبنان ووزارة البترول والثروة المعدنية المصرية استجرار الغاز من الجانب المصري، كي يستطيع لبنان ان يؤمن بعض حاجاته من الغاز الطبيعي، ما يساعد على انتاج نظيف للكهرباء وباسعار مقبولة ويحقق وفرا وديمومة. فالجانب السوري يدرك ان هنالك حوالى مليوني لاجئ سوري على الاراضي اللبنانية، وبالتالي في حال تطبيق الاتفاقات المذكورة يمكن تأمين غاز لمعمل دير عمار لكي ينتج اكثر من 400 ميغاواط تساعد كهرباء لبنان في هذه الفترة العصيبة، على ان يدفع لبنان ثمن الغاز في فترة تمتد من ثلاث الى اربع سنوات، وهذا الامر ليس بمستحيل على رغم العقوبات الاميركية على سوريا، اذ ان لبنان يستطيع ان يتشبه بالعراق الذي استطاع ان يؤمن استثناءات انسانية من العقوبات الاميركية المفروضة على إيران عبر محادثات جدية قام بها الجانب العراقي مع الادارة الاميركية، ويعتبر هذا الامر من الضروريات في الوقت الراهن بعيدا من السياسات الداخلية الضيقة التي تمنع القيام بهذه الخطوة المهمة. نجاح هذه الخطوة الوطنية يحتاج، بحسب بارودي، "إلى تعاون وتفهّم كل القوى السياسية اللبنانية لاهميتها في مجال تأمين الطاقة الكهربائية للمواطنين وقطاعات الانتاج اللبنانية التي تعاني الامرّين لتأمين كهرباء باسعار مقبولة للتمكن من الصمود بوجه الازمات التي يمر بها لبنان. فقد بلغت نسبة الفقر بين اللبنانيين نحو 50% وهي نسبة مرتفعة لم يعرفها لبنان من قبل والعدد مرشح للازدياد في حال عدم ايجاد حلول سريعة لما نعاني منه من هدر في مختلف القطاعات، علما ان الكهرباء تقع على رأس القطاعات التي ينبغي اعادة الحيوية اليها وفقا لما جاء في ورقة باريس الاصلاحية ولمطالب صندوق النقد الدولي والمجتمع الدولي لمد يد العون للبنان. واستجرار الغاز الى دير عمار سواء من سوريا او من مصر يساعد على تأمين هذا الامر ولو جزئيا، اذ يؤمن انطلاقا ثابتا ومنافسا للصناعة والزراعة وقطاع الخدمات كما مختلف القطاعات الإنتاجية الاخرى، ما يساعد على تقليل الخسائر التي تعاني منها الخزينة اللبنانية وعلى الحد من استنزاف موجودات مصرف لبنان من العملات الصعبة".

وينهي بارودي بالتأكيد على "أهمية قيام لبنان بتعديل المرسوم 6433 للعام 2011 والمتعلق بالمنطقة الاقتصادية الخالصة على الحدود الجنوبية، على ان يتم ارسال التعديل الى الامم المتحدة فورا لضمان الحفاظ على حقوقنا البحرية الجنوبية مع اسرائيل". وحاليا تستمر دراسة التعديلات المقترحة على هذا المرسوم بين الوزارات المعنية

وقيادة الجيش، على ان يتم في نهاية المطاف عرضه على رئيس الحكومة لتوقيعه وإحالته على رئاسة الجمهورية لإصدار الموافقة الاستثنائية المطلوبة.

Lebanese – Syrian Maritime Boundaries: Solutions Are Ready



By Roudi Baroudi

Lebanon's maritime boundaries with Syria have become a popular topic for public discussion of late, and that is a good thing. After all, the more our citizens know, the better-equipped they will be to identify national interests, and therefore to demand that elected officials pursue those interests above all other considerations.

This is only true, though, if the citizens in question have both correct information and a basic understanding of how international relations are conducted. Otherwise they risk being tricked by those actors, both Lebanese and foreigners, intent on furthering their own commercial, diplomatic,

geostrategic, personal, and/or political ambitions at the expense of Lebanon's national priorities.

Anyone seeking to sort out the back-and-forth over this latest chapter of Libano-Syrian relations should keep the following in mind:

– While certain political circles in Lebanon have been estranged from Syria's current government in recent years, relations between the two countries – not just national and diplomatic, but also economic, social, and family – go back millennia. Whatever disagreements come and go, the relationship is very much a brotherly one within the larger Arab family, and however much they may be at odds with one another, brothers are always there for each other when it matters most.

– Syria is not a party to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). It is, however, both a brotherly country and an observer state, and it should be kept in mind that the standards and practices of UNCLOS have become the norms by which maritime boundary disputes are resolved, whether by treaty, arbitration, or the verdict of a suitable international court.

– The length of the maritime border between Lebanon and Syria is approximately 53 nautical miles; between Lebanon and Cyprus, approximately 96 nautical miles; and between Lebanon and Israel, approximately 71 nautical miles.

In late March, Syrian news outlets reported that a Russian company, Capital Limited, had been contracted by the Syrian government to carry out offshore hydrocarbon exploration and development in Block 1, a parcel of seabed along the country's maritime border with Lebanon. Almost immediately, certain Lebanese politicians and Arab media sounded alarms to the effect that Syria was infringing Lebanon's rights, but what is certain is that Block 1 is located in the 100% neutral temporary natural line neutral, according to UNCLOS rules. However, according to global exploration information on global oil and gas concession areas for 2018, 2019, and 2021, and as

expected by oil industry specialists, the Syrian blocks have not changed: they have the same dimensions and positions as when they were announced by the Syrian government.
– According to the UN Table of Claims for 2011, Syria's legal maritime claims are as follows:
Territorial sea = 12 nautical miles
Adjacent areas = 24 nautical miles
Exclusive Economic Zone = 200 nautical miles
– If we look at the Lebanese blocks, we find that they also overlap with the Syrian blocks.
– Over the years, Lebanon and Syria have signed approximately 40 reciprocal agreements in various fields, including some related to the sharing of river waters common to the two countries, including the Assi (also known as the Orontes, or the Mimas) and the Kbir (also known as the Kbir al-Janoubi, which forms much of the northern border between the two countries. This lands border ends at the spot along the coast where the Kbir empties into the Mediterranean Sea, and where the countries have agreed a Land Terminus Point (LTP) at the mouth of the river, as shown on the accompanying map.

Given all of these facts and the overlap between Syrian and Lebanese claims, and in light of the geographical proximities, the numerous signed conventions between them, and their historically fraternal relations, the two countries could easily draw an equidistant line extending from the LTP to the trijunction with Cyprus, about 53 nautical miles offshore. The Lebanese Armed Forces recently did a tremendous job in a much more challenging task, preparing for and conducting negotiations over the far more contentious southern border with Israel, so reaching a deal with the Syrians should be relatively straightforward for the LAF.

With all due respect to those focused on the maritime border with Syria, given the relative ease with which that deal can be made, the more urgent task right now is to preserve our rights along the southern border with Israel, this by amending

Decree No. 6433 of 2011 and submitting the new coordinates, as allowed for by Article 3 of said decree, to the United Nations.

The Lebanese and Syrian governments can quickly solve the maritime border problems as long as the LTP line between the two countries is defined and the islands opposite the two countries are officially and unambiguous. As a bonus, a solution to this issue also could also open the way to a just and speedy demarcation of the boundary with Cyprus.

In the same context, so long as the objective is related to the energy sector, and considering the difficult economic and humanitarian situation facing Lebanon, the concerned Lebanese officials also should negotiate with their Syrian counterparts to quickly reactivate Law No. 509, issued on July 16, 2003, authorizing the conclusion of an agreement to sell gas between Lebanon and Syria. The Lebanese side should communicate with Egypt as well, in order to implement Decree. No. 15,722, issued on November 14, 2005. This decree endorsed a memorandum of cooperation between the Lebanese Ministry of Energy and Water and the Egyptian Ministry of Electricity and Energy authorizing the import of gas from Egypt. These two moves would enable Lebanon to cover at least some of its natural gas needs, whether from Syria or from Egypt via Syria, which would allow the generation of cleaner and more affordable electricity at the Deir al-Ammar power station, which was designed to run on gas but has burned diesel for most of the time since its commissioning in 1998.

In light of the fact that some 2 million displaced Syrians are still sheltering in Lebanon because of the continuing war in their homeland, there is good reason to hope that Damascus might adopt a humanitarian perspective by providing the gas on a grant basis (actual or de facto), which would help the Lebanese gain both savings and sustainability. In this scenario, the Lebanese population would derive all the benefits of the Deir al-Ammar station’s 400-megawatt capacity during a very difficult period, but the Lebanese state would

not be pressured to repay, giving it time and space to restore economic and fiscal stability. Some will object that US sanctions on Syria make such a deal impossible, but there is nothing stopping Lebanon from applying for the same kind of humanitarian exemption that Iraq received in order to purchase Iranian oil. All that's needed is for Lebanon's most influential politicians to set aside the infighting for the sake of an urgent national need.

Total keen to participate in bid for entering North Field East (NFE) project with QP: Bouyer

French broad energy company Total, which has been present in Qatar since 1936, looks forward to participate in the bid for

entering the multi-billion dollar North Field East (NFE) project with QP, said Matthieu Bouyer, managing director, Total E&P Qatar and Total country chair in Qatar.

In February, Qatar Petroleum (QP) took the final investment decision for developing the $28.75bn North Field East Project (NFE), the world's largest LNG project, which will raise Qatar's LNG production capacity from 77mn tonnes per year (mmtpy) to 110 mmtpy by 2025.

"HE the Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida al-Kaabi mentioned in February that the results should be known by the year end. We are mobilised and would definitely like to be associated with this giant expansion," Bouyer said in an interview with Gulf Times in Doha.

Total, which has been active in all areas of Qatar's energy sector, from exploration and production to refining, petrochemicals and marketing of lubricants, is a founding partner of Qatargas and a founding member and leading partner of Dolphin Energy.

Speaking about Total's short and mid-term strategy, Bouyer said, "In our current joint ventures, we are on the verge of launching large scale projects… so we are putting a lot of efforts to support them as much as possible in the project definition and execution phases in order to secure future energy production for the State of Qatar.

"Our short and mid-term strategy involves diversification of our business and implementing the group strategy in Qatar through renewables in particular."

Bouyer was quick to emphasise the importance Total attaches to safety of its staff and operations.

"Although Qatar has been managing Covid-19 remarkably well, our clear daily priority is to keep our staff and operations safe amid the pandemic crisis. Beyond the Covid risk management, we expect the highest level of safety in a context of fatigue and weariness."

Bouyer sees a "bright" future for liquefied natural gas and Qatar's LNG industry as a whole.

"Economists and market analysts believe LNG holds significant

growth prospects in the long run. Natural gas stands out as a transition fuel, to replace coal in particular, thereby reducing emissions.

“Two major economies in Asia – China and India have been witnessing increasing demand for LNG… even in 2020 in the middle of the most unprecedented crisis the world has faced.”

“At Total, our goal is clear – more energy and less emissions. Our ambition is to be Net Zero by 2050 together with society”, Bouyer said and noted “to achieve this, we base our strategy in particular on two growth pillars – LNG and renewables. We are one of the top leading players in LNG. That said, as a broad energy company, our portfolio comprises not only oil and gas, but also power, mainly from renewables.”

To anchor this strategy, Total will propose to its shareholders in May this year to change its name to become ‘TotalEnergies’, Bouyer said.

Praising Qatar’s efforts at developing its LNG industry, Bouyer said, “In the last 25 years, Qatar has become the largest LNG exporting country with more than 77mn tonnes per annum annum (Mtpa) of high quality LNG capacity.

In February, Qatar launched the biggest LNG project worldwide – North Field Expansion, with an additional 33 mtpy with high environmental standards. And they are working to further increase this with a future phase – North Field South that is planned to be put online right after.

“So definitely, LNG has a role and will be the main contributor to Qatar energy development, looking forward.”

Total is the shareholder and sole operator of Al Khalij offshore oilfield. In 2016, Total won the bid for Al Shaheen offshore oilfield, resulting in North Oil Company, established as a partnership between Total and QP.

Total is present in five downstream joint ventures (JVs) in Qatar, three in petrochemicals (Qapco, Qatofin, RLOC) and two in refining (Laffan Refineries 1 and 2).

Total supported Qatar to build the first ethane cracker in the Middle East at Qapco.

“Since then, Total has been involved in many upgrades or

expansions of the downstream sector in Qatar, supporting its JVs and their projects with secondees and specialised technical services," Bouyer said.
Total Marketing Qatar has a prominent market share for lubricants in Qatar for automotive, construction, industrial and marine customers.
The Total Research Center Qatar at QSTP has leading edge and innovative research projects related to sustainable development, marine biodiversity, biofuels, and solar energy.
Total said its commitment to sharing its expertise is fuelled by its aim is to develop home-grown solutions to its local operational challenges, thus supporting and contribution to Qatar's vision of developing a knowledge-based economy.
TRC-Q also acts as a bridge between industry and academia to bring innovative solutions to our operations, he said.

Big brands join $1bn forest conservation push for SE Asia

Major household brands and palm-oil buyers Nestle and PepsiCo have backed a scheme that aims to invest $1bn in forest conservation across Southeast Asia over 25 years. The Rimba Collective, developed by Lestari Capital, a Singapore-based impact investment firm, will fund projects that protect and restore more than 500,000 hectares (1.2mn acres) of tropical forests in Indonesia and the region. “By linking conservation funding directly with company operations, it has the potential to be a game-changer for forest protection and restoration,” Michal Zrust, Lestari Capital co-founder, told a virtual launch event this week. The initiative will complement eff orts by other groups to build more sustainable palm-oil supply chains, he added. In 2020, tropical forest losses around the world equalled the size of the Netherlands, according to monitoring service Global Forest Watch.

Green groups blame production of commodities like palm oil and minerals for much of the destruction of forests, as they are cleared for plantations, ranches, farms and mines. Cutting down forests has major implications for global goals to curb climate change, as trees absorb about a third of the planet-

warming emissions produced worldwide, but release carbon back into the air when they rot or are burned. Forests also provide food and livelihoods, and are an essential habitat for wildlife. Indonesia is home to the world's third-largest tropical forests but is also its biggest producer of palm oil, an edible oil used in everything from margarine to soap and fuel. Many big buyers of palm oil, besides purchasing certified sustainable oil, have invested in technologies to monitor their supply chains and help stop deforestation, but with limited success so far. The Rimba Collective will have an initial focus on projects in Indonesia and aims to be the largest businessled conservation initiative in the region. Its founding partners are consumer goods companies Nestle, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble and Singapore-based agribusiness Wilmar International.

They will contribute funding managed by Lestari Capital for a portfolio of forest conservation projects in Southeast Asia. It is hoped more investors, such as commodity traders, palm oil processors and growers, consumer goods firms and manufacturers, will join the scheme before the first payments are made in December. Projects will be selected based on their potential to protect and restore large areas of natural ecosystems and critical habitats such as rainforest, peatland and mangroves. Other priorities are to generate measurable ecosystem benefits – including carbon sequestration, water purification and soil health – and decent livelihoods for local communities. Benjamin Ware, global head of sustainable sourcing and climate delivery at Nestle, said the firm's involvement would "enable us to speed up our proactive eff orts to protect forests and peatlands as well as human rights", beyond its supply chain.

Last year, well-known brands launched a fresh push to stop commodity supply chains fuelling forest loss. It was met with scepticism by many green groups after the same set of companies failed to meet a 2020 target to purchase only

sustainably produced commodities. Environmentalists urged firms in the Rimba Collective to ensure their entire supply chains are not linked to deforestation and to transparently report on progress. Grant Rosoman, senior adviser at Greenpeace International, said more finance for forest conservation, especially led by communities, was desperately needed. He welcomed the long-term nature of the new scheme and the fact that its results will be verified independently. But transparency around how it works, including its costs, payments and the organisation running it, are crucial, he added. “We are also concerned that with carbon sequestration as one of the stated benefits, carbon credits may be claimed and sold to climate polluters,” he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. Marcus Colchester, a senior policy advisor at the UK-based Forest Peoples Programme, called the Rimba project “innovative” and urged Indonesia to help by simplifying its onerous process for recognising customary land rights. Kevin Woods, a senior policy analyst at Washington-based nonprofit Forest Trends, said studies showed results are poor when forest conservation does not support those rights. “This can be best achieved by funds going through local organisations that work closely with forest-based communities on…conservation,” he said.

Europe gasoline rockets despite demand blight from lockdowns

As Europeans drive less, the price they're paying for gasoline to power their cars is moving higher as the continent's oil refineries boost exports — but make less — of the fuel.

The so-called crack spread, the price at which gasoline trades over crude oil, hit its strongest for the time of year since 2017 at the start of April. That's helped push retail prices to their highest in years on a seasonal basis in several of the continent's big consumer nations including Germany, France and Italy.

At least a quarter of the gasoline-making units at northwest Europe's oil refineries have been offline recently for maintenance, or suffered unplanned disruption. That's further reduced output at a time when plants are processing less crude oil anyway because of the pandemic. Add in healthy exports, in particular to the U.S., and prices suggest the market has more than offset the lost demand.

"There's a huge pull on European gasoline to other key regions," said Mark Williams, an oil analyst at Wood Mackenzie Ltd., adding that resurgent demand in the U.S. is boosting the European market.

When Europe’s spring lockdowns came into force last year, millions of barrels of gasoline demand disappeared and processing margins sank deep into negative territory. This time that hasn’t happened, despite the continent’s latest wave of mobility-restricting lockdowns limiting road use and perpetuating weakness in two other key transport fuels: diesel and jet fuel.

European exports of gasoline to the U.S. surged by more than 60% month-on-month in March and are set to stay strong in April, according to data from Kpler, an analytics firm. Shipments to West Africa are also healthy, averaging almost half a million barrels a day in the first quarter of this year. Nigeria has also recently said it won’t phase out gasoline subsidies.

At the same time, Europe’s own supply is being squeezed with multiple gasoline-making units called fluid catalytic crackers taken offline.

Germany’s Miro refinery, which normally supplies between a quarter and a third of the nation’s gasoline, has undergone a major overhaul this spring. The U.K.’s Pembroke plant is also among refineries that reduced supply in recent weeks.

“These outages are likely not economically motivated, but more a result of scheduling,” said Koen Wessels, an analyst at Energy Aspects, noting the loss of output has been supporting margins.

The refinery disruption and high exports have helped to strengthen Europe’s gasoline market even as the continent’s road use slumped to its lowest so far this year in the week through March 28, according to transport data compiled by Bloomberg. It was down about 30% on average, compared with pre-pandemic levels.

While those forces are helping gasoline, they’re not enough to push margins for other key transport fuels back to seasonal

norms. With Europe’s air traffic still more than 60% below the pre-pandemic level, refiners are still shifting jet fuel production into diesel, adding to supplies and pulling down prices.

“We could well see another few weeks of strength before refiners bring on enough capacity to alleviate the shortage meaningfully,” said Eugene Lindell, an analyst at JBC Energy, when asked about current gasoline strength. “We would expect the ample spare capacity to take care of the issue once runs are ramped up.”

US fossilfuel companies took billions in taxbreaks and then laid off thousands

Fossil-fuel companies have received billions of dollars in tax benefits from the US government as part of coronavirus relief

measures, only to lay off tens of thousands of their workers during the pandemic, new figures reveal.

A group of 77 firms involved in the extraction of oil, gas and coal received $8.2bn under tax-code changes that formed part of a major pandemic stimulus bill passed by Congress last year. Five of these companies also got benefits from the paycheck protection program, totaling more than $30m.

Despite this, almost every one of the fossil-fuel companies laid off workers, with a more than 58,000 people losing their jobs since the onset of the pandemic, or around 16% of the combined workforces.

The largest beneficiary of government assistance has been Marathon Petroleum, which has got $2.1bn in tax benefits.

However, in the year to December 2020, the Ohio-based refining company laid off 1,920 workers, or around 9% of its workforce. As a comparative ratio, Marathon has received around $1m for each worker it made redundant, according to BailoutWatch, a nonprofit advocacy group that analyzed Securities and Exchange Commission filings to compile all the data.

Phillips 66, Vistra Corp, National Oilwell Varco and Valero were the next largest beneficiaries of the tax-code changes, with all of them shedding jobs in the past year. In the case of National Oilwell Varco, a Houston-headquartered drilling supply company, 22% of the workforce was fired, despite federal government tax assistance amounting to $591m.

Other major oil and gas companies including Devon Energy and Occidental Petroleum also took in major pandemic tax benefits in the last year while also shedding thousands of workers.

“I’m not surprised that these companies took advantage of these tax benefits, but I’m horrified by the layoffs after they got this money,” said Chris Kuveke, a researcher at BailoutWatch.

“Last year’s stimulus was about keeping the economy going, but these companies didn’t use these resources to retain their workers. These are companies that are polluting the environment, increasing the deadliness of the pandemic and letting go of their workers.”

The tax benefits stems from a change in the Cares Act from March last year that allowed companies that had made a loss since 2013 to use this to offset their taxes, receiving this refund as a payment.

The extended carry-back benefit was embraced by the oil and gas industry, with many companies suffering losses even before Covid-19 hit. Pandemic shutdowns then severely curtailed travel by people for business or pleasure, dealing a major blow to fossil-fuel companies through the plummeting use of oil, with the price of a barrel of oil even entering negative territory at one point last year.

A spokesman for Marathon, the one company to answer questions on the layoffs, said the business made “the very difficult decision” to reduce its workforce, providing severance and extended healthcare benefits to those affected.

“These difficult decisions were part of a broader, comprehensive effort, which also included implementing strict capital discipline and overall expense management to lower our cost structure, to improve the company’s resiliency, and re-position it for long-term success,” the spokesman said. “We look forward to better days ahead for everyone as the nation emerges from the pandemic.”

This expense management didn’t extend to the pay of Marathon’s chief executive, Michael Hennigan, who made $15.5m in 2020. According to BailoutWatch, Marathon’s chief executive is paid 99 times the average company worker’s salary.

“They had no problem paying their executives for good performance when they didn’t perform well,” said Kuveke.

“There is no problem with working Americans retaining their jobs but I don’t believe we should subsidize an industry that has been supported by the government for the past 100 years. It’s time to stop subsidizing them and start facing the climate crisis.”

Faced by growing political and societal pressure in their role in the climate crisis and the deaths of millions of people each year through air pollution, the oil and gas industry has sought to paint itself as the protector of thousands of American workers who face joblessness due to Joe Biden’s climate policies.

“Targeting specific industries with new taxes would only undermine the nation’s economic recovery and jeopardize good-paying jobs, including union jobs,” said Frank Macchiarola, senior vice-president for policy, economic and regulatory affairs at lobby group American Petroleum Institute, following Biden’s announcement of a new climate-focused infrastructure plan on Wednesday.

“It’s important to note that our industry receives no special tax treatment, and we will continue to advocate for a tax code that supports a level playing field for all economic sectors along with policies that sustain and grow the billions of dollars in government revenue that we help generate.”

Inevitable fragments of a carbonneutral society:

Natural gas coupled with CCUS, renewables, and hydrogen

As global society keeps pursuing a zero-carbon energy system, hydrogen’s role is becoming more notable. Updates and progress around the topic are now being broadcasted at an increasing pace, extending to areas that promise a significant role for hydrogen. Just a couple of years ago, everyone had agreed that hydrogen would gain a meaningful share by around 2050. However, these days, due to sanctioned projects and the advancement of the related technologies with a set of adopted strategies, it is believed that the hydrogen era will materialise much earlier.

Hydrogen is not the only piece of the puzzle to achieve carbon neutrality, but it is the one that promises a feasible pathway

towards net zero-emission through complementing other routes such as electrification and natural gas coupled with CCUS (carbon capture, utilisation and storage). The supremacy of hydrogen is based on the possibility that it can be employed to decarbonise the so-called hard-to-abate sectors or in sectors in which other decarbonisation pathways, such as electrification, are challenged. These sectors include but are not limited to steel, iron and cement, as well as heavy long-haul vehicles, aviation, and maritime and railways transportation. The GECF Hydrogen Scenario encompasses some of these recent developments in its latest update, which was published in February 2021. The Scenario has taken into consideration the latest updates and strategies adopted by countries and groups and assessed their impacts.

Currently, several countries have officially published their hydrogen strategies or hydrogen roadmaps. In some of the roadmaps and strategies such as the EU Hydrogen Strategy, the main priority has been attached to renewable hydrogen. While in some others, such as for Japan, Russia, and South Korea, blue hydrogen is envisaged to take a meaningful role. In certain strategies, definite and clear targets are set, like for the EU Hydrogen Strategy that considers a minimum of 40 GW installed renewable hydrogen electrolyser or 10mn tonnes (mt) of renewable hydrogen by 2030. Within the EU Hydrogen Strategy, another 40 GW is also defined as a target to install in the neighbouring countries and import to the EU. According to the latest results from the updated GECF Hydrogen Scenario which assumes a practical penetration of hydrogen into the future of the energy system, the demand for hydrogen by 2050 will increase by more than four times. However, the carbon saving through this hydrogen penetration is forecasted to be less than six (6) $GtCO_2$ – far below the amount needed to achieve the Paris Agreement goals.

This result emphasises that, firstly, the hydrogen production supply chain needs to advance in all parts, and the cost

should be reduced to gain more share in the future of the energy system. Secondly, the result highlights that hydrogen could not be the only solution in the carbon neutrality pathway, and other clean and decarbonised options, such as the application of natural gas coupled with CCUS has to be seriously taken into consideration by all stakeholders. Henceforth, let’s take a look at some results and forecasts from the Reference Case Scenario (RCS) of the latest GECF Global Gas Outlook 2050 (GGO 2050), as it will enable a clear view of the potential needs to fully decarbonise the hard-to-abate energy sectors when hydrogen is hypothetically assumed to take a sole role. According to the RCS results, the total EU transport demand in so-called hard-to-abate sectors will be reduced from 217mn tonnes of oil equivalent (mtoe); in 2019 and pre-Covid-19 pandemic situation, to around 150 mtoe by 2050. This reduction is primarily due to the energy efficiency enhancement of the fleets. In order to produce 150 mtoe of energy, around 52mt of hydrogen is needed, requiring more than 500 GW of electrolyser. This should be added to the demand from the iron, steel, and cement industry (other assumed hard-to-abate sectors.) The fossil fuel demand (coal, natural gas and oil products) from these sectors in the EU is forecasted to stand at 24 mtoe by 2050. To meet this level of demand only with green hydrogen, around 70 GW of the electrolyser must be installed. Based on the forecasted demand levels, the EU will need around 570 GW of electrolyser capacity to decarbonise the aforementioned hard-to-abate sectors in case that the green hydrogen is assumed to be the only solution. Based on technical circumstances and the policy, in the EU Hydrogen Strategy, the target was set to 2 x 40 GW renewable hydrogen by 2030. Therefore, the needed electrolyser capacity for 2050 seems to be challenging but feasible in the EU. However, we still need to bear in mind some other salient points. The first point is that these results are based on assuming a successful effort in enhancing energy efficiency, and the level is subject to uncertainty. The second is that this is the volume needed only to decarbonise the referenced hard-to-

abate sectors. Several other consuming sectors are supposed to be decarbonised through other pathways such as electrification.

They also create a massive volume of renewable electricity demand. A big question mark here is to gauge if there is a sufficient potential of renewable energies within the EU to accommodate all renewable electricity demand in the sectors and meet the electricity demand of electrolysers to produce green hydrogen. By looking into this subject from a global perspective, it can be observed that much more hydrogen is needed to decarbonise even these so-called hard-to-abate sectors. According to the latest modelling results published in GGO 2050, the global energy demand from hard-to-abate subsectors within transportation will stand at around 1800 mtoe per annum by 2050. In a hypothetical assumption, to provide this amount of energy only through green hydrogen production, more than 6,000 GW of electrolyser will be needed. This level is around five times more than the total current wind and solar installed capacity.

With similar calculations again on the imaginary only-green hydrogen assumption, 1,500 GW of electrolyser should be installed for the decarbonisation of iron, steel, and cement sectors. While numerous sectors are still not included in these calculations, other measures are assumed for the purpose of decarbonisation as well. In conclusion, the undeniable fact is that that there is no sole solution for carbon neutrality. Indeed, a combination of measures needs to be applied to achieve a net-zero emission. Apart from the energy conservation and energy efficiency enhancement that results in a reduction in final energy demand, clean energy supply should be diversely sourced from all clean available potentials. Renewables, natural gas, and CCUS will take greater roles in their original form, and all of them should contribute to the hydrogen production. In closing, renewables, natural gas, CCUS, and hydrogen are inevitable parts of a fully

decarbonised energy system.