

LESSONS LEARNED

One of our foremost scientists said that electricity belongs to everyone and electricity should be free.

Today, in the midst of conflicts, in a post-pandemic world on the brink of an economic crisis, we have seen from the presentations of both Dr Buschle and Mr Dedinec that **Serbia is one of the most import dependent countries in Europe with over EUR 1 billion of electricity import only in 2022**. On the other hand, our electricity seems to be cheap. Serbia has one of the lowest retail prices of electricity for both households and industrial consumers, with the latter even being increased by 22% this year.

My key takeaway from the presentation of Dr Buschle, however, is that **crisis is not the problem – it is our lack of preparedness for the crisis**. Dr Buschle focused on one part of the problem – and of the solution – which is Serbian utilities.

Dr Buschle explained their issues in three blunt examples: no liquidity, no diversification, and no corporate governance. For liquidity, we mentioned that Serbia received EUR 165 million in aid from the EU already in 2022 and that most of the energy projects in Serbia are financed through credit from the IFIs, the likes of the EBRD.

So, what can we do to avoid social unrest and bankruptcy scenarios? Apart from the price capping and furthering integration into the EU market noted by Dr Buschle and the detailed review of the Greek example from my namesake Ms Mira Todorovic Simeonides, I particularly liked the three pillars mentioned by Mr. Vuković.

Mr Vuković emphasized that we need to **accelerate clean energy transition, diversify our energy sources and save energy**. Sounds simple. Mr Vuković also gave a positive review of the Serbian underground gas storage levels being above required.

In respect of diversification, I particularly appreciated the key message of Mr. Dedinec's presentation. **In times of crisis, our instinct is to revert to our comfort zones and to what we know – which means burning coal**. What we do not see is that crisis can be a catalyst for positive change. This development of hydrogen potentials in North Macedonia is a good example.

New technologies are not only good for our environment, but they are what makes our energy systems independent.

With that, I would like to touch on the presentation of Ms Soo-Young Hwang who reminded us that our right to clean energy sources is linked to our right to a clean environment which is nothing other than a right to our public health.

They say opportunities are often missed because they look like hard work. I say, let us do the hard work.

The motto for this conference is "Nothing will ever be the same". I say, maybe that is a good thing.

Andjelka Todorovic, attorney-at-law with Wolf Theiss and UPES member transcript from the speech from the UPES conference on 25 November 2022