

Co-financing 'a must' for Malta to join Euro gas market



European Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger being welcomed by the head of the European Representation in Malta, Martin Bugelli (right) and Resources Minister George Pullicino at Malta International Airport, yesterday. Photo: Reuben Piscopo/DOI

Technical and feasibility studies should be completed in the next 18 months to determine the most cost-effective way for Malta to be integrated into the European gas market, European Energy Commissioner Günther Oettinger said yesterday.

Mr Oettinger said bringing gas to Malta, with its population of 430,000, was not a business case so co-financing would be necessary.

The plans for the integration of Malta into the European gas market in the next five to eight years were ambitious but realistic, he said, and would serve to bring more diversification and less dependency.

Plans for the interconnector between Italy, Sicily and Malta were concrete and should materialise in the next two to three years, with co-financing from the EU. The aim was to connect Malta to the European electricity grid by 2014.

With regard to the 2020 plan for Europe to produce 20 per cent of renewable energy, he said Malta had a clear strategy to reach 10 per cent and that would be accepted because not every member state was the same due to their strategic locations. "Twenty per cent is the overall European target but every country had to do what it can," he said.

Resources Minister George Pullicino said that between 2006 and 2018, Malta would have invested €37 million in incentive schemes for households and local industry in terms of renewable energy.

He said that during the "good" working lunch with Mr Oettinger and Finance Minister Tonio Fenech talks also revolved around the situation in Cyprus, which was similar to Malta in that it was also an isolated energy network. The recent breakdown of over 30 per cent of its electricity generation due to an incident next to a power plant was considered to be an "eye opener" as to how fragile countries like Malta, in the periphery of the EU, were and what could be done for them to join the European grid.

Asked about the extension to the Delimara power station, which would run on heavy fuel oil, Mr Oettinger said the highest level of standards possible always had to be achieved without jeopardising security of supply.