

The Region of Western Macedonia has been the core energy producing area in Greece. The source of energy has been and still is coal, the burning of lignite. The economy of the region still revolves around and depends on lignite. Recently, by decision of the Prime Minister, all & any lignite activity in Greece ceases in 2023. Western Macedonia is today classified as a region in transition, towards the post-lignite era. This is a radical diversification for the regional economy. In the short run, losing thousands of jobs appears, at the present, as very probable. The region needs to confront this reality and find solution to this very complex equation.

A transition strategy was devised. As part of this transition strategy, the Region of Western Macedonia, aims at maintaining its historical specialisation & leading role as energy producer and further reinforcing it as an energy storage region, by exploring the potential of hydrogen technologies. On October 9th, 2019 the "White Dragon" plan was submitted to the EC for funding under the option of *Important Projects of Common European Interest*. The submitted plan concerns the replacement of the current lignite-based production and applications by hydrogen: the production of thermal energy from hydrogen which will cover the needs of district heating, energy storage, hydrogen propulsion, etc. It is worth noting that in Greece there is still no legal framework regarding the use of hydrogen in energy production.

Submitting the 'White Dragon' plan was a turning point. Initially, my idea of the possibilities and opportunities that investing in hydrogen technologies could generate was not widely accepted. Just a year ago, even high-ranking European Union officials were skeptical of the possibility of exploiting Hydrogen and applying its technologies. On 8th July 2020, however, the European Commission approved the European Union's Hydrogen Strategy and launched the European Pure Hydrogen Alliance, with the aim of creating an investment channel to increase production and support clean hydrogen demand in the EU.

At the same time, the Region of Western Macedonia has already approved the feasibility of a proposal for the application of hydrogen technology combined with a small photovoltaic park for the energy upgrading of a building in the Region and, with the excess hydrogen supply to be utilised through a Hydrogen Refueling Station (HRS), for alternative mobility purposes.

All these concerted actions, orchestrated by strong EU initiatives, continuous development of hydrogen applications, knowledge and further research, as well as systematic awareness raising have contributed to the wider acceptance of hydrogen technologies by the citizens of the Region, as well as by the Government themselves. We can say that a breakthrough has been achieved. What we need to confront now are the lack of a legal framework providing for the application of hydrogen technologies including mobility solutions in Greece and a funding programme dedicated to furthering the development and diffusion of applications of this rapidly evolving technology, explore the potential of this very promising research domain as a mainstream solution provider.

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