

Speech by Norwegian Minister of EEA and EU Affairs Vidar Helgesen

President, Prime Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate you with the safe arrival of the ‘Independence’ – on time and according to plan. This project means greater energy security for Lithuania, *and* for Latvia and Estonia.

I am proud that this has been made possible through Hoegh LNG’s delivery of this vessel and Statoil’s supplies of gas. The project is a prime example of innovative, cost effective and flexible solutions. And it has the potential of supporting more climate friendly solutions for instance in the Baltic Sea shipping.

The economic ties between Norway and Lithuania are already strong. With the ‘Independence’, a new chapter is opening. Further improvement of energy security, and the development of new energy projects, are crucial to economic growth and welfare in Lithuania. The new LNG facility will create jobs and make energy prices more predictable for private households and Lithuanian businesses.

Norwegian companies have the capacity to take part in new energy projects in Lithuania and the region. We encourage the establishment of a regional gas market.

Lithuania is a front-runner in the EU when it comes to implementing floating regas technology, and has taken important steps to integrate its energy system with Latvia and Estonia.

By opening the way for suppliers from Europe and the rest of the world, the 'Independence' will help bring the Baltic countries out of their 'energy island'. Gas and energy links with neighbouring countries means a step towards developing a more extensive European energy net.

Energy security is a key to security in the broader sense. The geopolitical situation today is a cause for concern for all European countries.

The 'Independence' has arrived at the right moment to contribute to stability in the region and as a vital link to the rest of Europe and the wider world.

Thank you.