

Dear colleagues and friends, both in the international gas business (in WS2 GAC, Gasunie, Gate LNG Terminal, GIE, GLE, ENTSOG, DG ENERGY, European Gas Conference, etc.) and beyond it.

It is with great sorrow that I would like to inform you that Wim Groenendijk, the last co-chair from the EU side in the Work Stream 2 “Internal Markets” of the EU-Russia Gas Advisory Council (WS2 GAC) and my counterpart in this capacity, suddenly passed away on February 6 from a heart attack while he was in Portugal. He was just 62 years old.

Any death of a person comes as an unexpected event, whether you are prepared for this by circumstances or not. But sometimes, when it happens, it takes all those who knew the person totally unprepared for his death, since there were no visual symptoms for this at all. And the person in question would have never been associated with the coming end of life. That was my personal perception of the case with Wim – with his positive energy, enthusiasm, proactive vision and attitude towards life and profession I would have never assumed such an abrupt development. The attached photo shows Wim full of life (this is his avatar from his mobile telephone number), which reflects my perception of him.



Through his prominent professional career, Wim has held a number of important and noticeable positions in gas business. As he wrote himself in his short bio, he “has served as Managing Director at Gate Terminal at Maasvlakte, in the Rotterdam area, from November 2018 until May 2022. Previously he served as Director of the International Business department in Gasunie. Within that role he was also serving as Head of Representation for Gasunie in the Russian Federation and as Managing Director of Gasunie Engineering B.V. Before that, he served amongst others as head of the International and Regulatory Affairs department of Gasunie. Before joining Gasunie in 2007, Wim worked for 17 years for Shell International in various management positions and locations and in a broad range of disciplines including research, operations, business development and strategy.

Wim has also been active as Vice-President and member of the Board of Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE) and the President of Gas LNG Europe (GLE). From December 2009 until November 2012 he served as a member of the Board of ENTSOG, the European Network for Transmission Operators for Gas, a body established through the third EU Energy package. From 2003 until 2011 he was a member of the Wadden Advisory Council, a formal Government advisory body on the environmentally sensitive Wadden Sea area. He has been chairman of the EASEE-gas Executive Committee from 2002 till 2006. His specialties were: European and regulatory affairs, strategy, planning, negotiation, commercial and LNG.

I have my personal feeling that maybe he was not too happy with his retirement and that the process of EU-Russia informal consultations, that we two have been co-chairing, was so abruptly frozen. Maybe these events have over-balanced his growing interest in his family farming business, handling the pumpkins, producing six sorts of beer, etc.

From at least the mid-2000s I have first occasionally and then more regularly contacted Wim Groenendijk, including mostly on specific Russia-EU topics and projects. And since beginning of 2020 we became regular counterparts with him with quite intensive (though online due to the COVID-19 pandemic) contacts after DG ENERGY has appointed Wim in end-2019 a new co-chair from the EU side in WS2 GAC as a successor to Walter Boltz (former Chairman of the Austrian Energy Regulatory authority “E-Control”).

I would recall that our first meeting with Wim, where/when we got acquainted, was sometime in mid-2000s, in the Energy Charter Secretariat in Brussels (ECS, where I was working through 2000-2008 as Deputy Secretary General) at one of the seminars of the Industry Advisory Panel of the ECS. I do not remember precisely what he was speaking about then, but I do remember my immediate impression that he has made upon the audience and me in particular: a highly professional presentation, well-argued speech, calm tone and the pitch of the voice, nice vision and convincing behaviour. The substance of his presentation has eroded but the feeling of excellence has stayed for the years. I remember that he was then in Shell and that his name was difficult for me to pronounce initially (I guess, as mine for him as well).

Cooperation and, further on, friendship, if started between the people in the adult years and not in the childhood, is possible when the people are “looking in the same direction”, share similar values, work together on reaching the same aim, trust each other, etc. This was my case with Wim – we began to trust each other and that trust was proven by a few episodes when we tried to find mutually acceptable and mutually beneficial, from our view, solutions for Russia and the EU. In all episodes - in quite difficult circumstances.

One of such episodes was the story as of 2014 with the South Stream gas pipeline which did not, finally and unfortunately, materialise in its initial configuration and the project was converted into Turkish Stream, half of the capacity of the Blue Stream and with the exit point of the offshore pipeline not in Bulgaria (Varna) but in Turkey (Kıyıköy). Major debates between Russian and the EU sides at that time were on the regulatory regime of the onshore continuation of the offshore South Stream pipeline within the EU from Varna towards Baumgarten (Austria) and Tarvisio (Italy).

Ukrainian transit disputes of January 2006 and January 2009 being fresh in the memory, Gazprom would have preferred in case of South Stream (offshore plus onshore) to leave ownership rights for the onshore pipe within the EU under control of affiliated joint ventures between Gazprom and national TSOs through the route of the pipe. This would have diminished maintenance (technical) risks of the transit segments of the pipe through the whole route within the EU to the delivery points in Baumgarten/Tarvisio and would enable Gazprom to possess control both over the gas in the pipe (up to the delivery points – in Baumgarten and Tarvisio) and the pipe itself (up to delivery points). The EU position was different since the rules of unbundling were in place in the EU since the Second Energy Package (SEP- 2003) and now then already the Third EU Energy Package (TEP-2009) was in place. So the Gazprom proposal was totally unacceptable for the EU. The Commission referred also to the auction principle of access to the transportation capacity (since it considered only auction to be a non- discriminative procedure) and was not ready to provide such access to Gazprom as a shipper (moreover, Gazprom was the only one single possible shipper at the entry point of the onshore continuation of offshore White Stream pipeline at the Bulgarian Black Sea coast) on the non-auction basis. Russia (Gazprom) has referred to bilateral investment treaties signed with corresponding states of South-East Europe (SEE) before they joined the EU and SEP-2003 with its unbundling rules came into force. The long legal debate between the parties took place with no vision of mutual solution in the perspective.

Wim and his team prepared an alternative draft solution that we discussed with him and presented to Gazprom (to Deputy CEO Alexander Medvedev). It was based on an “open season” procedure (this was intensively discussed in 2004-2007 between Russia and EU delegations, under coordination of ECS, in the course of finalisation of the Energy Charter Protocol on transit and was well-known to both parties), long-term booking of the transportation capacity of the onshore pipelines from Varna to Baumgarten/Tarvisio which could be ring-fenced, etc. This procedure at that time (2014) was already discussed in the ENTSOG Working group preparing TEP-2009 Network Code on incremental capacities (CAM NC INC). Gasunie was ready to be considered as independent, knowledgeable and experienced TSO (much more experienced than the individual TSOs of SEE states) of such ring-fenced onshore pipelines. Such pipelines would be treated as separated market zones – in full reliance with the EU rules.

The proposal of Wim and his team presented a practical solution of the seemingly-to-be-unsolvable dilemma, in full reliance with EU TEP-2009 rules, to the benefit of Gazprom as well. Experience of Gasunie as TSO, on the one hand, and its long cooperation with Gazprom, on the other hand, guaranteed that it would have been a trusted and reliable independent operator, be it Gasunie (or some other experienced TSO from northwest Europe) alone or a joint venture between them and individual TSOs of SEE states along the route of the pipeline. This means transit risks will be minimised, security of supply will be provided. That was an excellent Wim’s proposal – but events unfolded differently: it was too short a time available for this idea to reach the top of the decision-making in Russia before an alternative decision – to move to Turkish Stream – was taken.

Crucial people in the Commission were very supportive of this alternative decision prepared by Wim and his team. One of the reasons was that they would not like to substitute Ukrainian transit risks by Turkish ones since this would not solve the transit problem as such.

Reliability of Gasunie for Gazprom at that time, and thus validity of its proposal, was based on the intensive interaction between two companies at this period where Wim was one of the key players. Within the programme of cooperation between Gazprom and Gasunie (which lasted for more than 10 years), and in his capacity as Director of the International Business department and Head of Representation for Gasunie in Russia, Wim had been chairing in mid-2010s a joint working group on strategic cooperation between the two companies with key emphasis on development of the European gas markets and future role of gas in energy balance. Under Wim's leadership this working group worked on strengthening partner relations between two companies to promote the positive role of gas, to increase its perceived attractiveness and to improve its position in the future energy balance. Participants of the working group shared information and opinions on the issues important for both companies in regard to international gas-related developments, facilitating positive gas image and its role within the EU. This improved mutual trust and reliability between the two companies and Wim was one of the pillars of this process.

In November 2018 Wim took his position as Managing Director at Gate LNG Terminal in Rotterdam and he looked very enthusiastic for me through our communications since that time. He was very proud of the Gate's successful development (by the way, earlier that year the Gate terminal started to position itself as LNG transshipment hub for Russian volumes from Novatek's Yamal LNG project) and he was ready to share information about this success with those who were interested in gas. At the very beginning of 2020, shortly after his appointment as WS2 GAC co-chair, we discussed with Wim a prospective visit of the WS2 GAC team, at his invitation, to his terminal when the next WS2 GAC meeting was to take place in Brussels (or maybe in Rotterdam). Wim would have been ready to explain in all the details the current functioning of the Gate Terminal and its prospects to WS2 GAC participants who represent different segments of the international/cross-border gas value chain. The COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately did not provide us with the opportunity to become Wim's guests at the Gate LNG Terminal.

As the President of GLE, Wim had a special attraction to small-scale LNG, like me, and this topic we discussed as well. He knew my interest in conceptual development of prospective Black Sea – Danube market for small-scale LNG (which I have been working on with my post-graduate students) as a potential area for Russia-EU cooperation, especially and primarily with/within the SEE states and Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) area¹. We have discussed this concept with him and he provided me with a number of helpful pieces of advice (this concept unfortunately stayed at academic research level due to current political developments).

We were quite enthusiastic with Wim that two parties have managed to revitalise WS2 GAC activities since early 2018 when DG ENERGY has adapted the vision of EU energy future from being “digital, electrical, renewable” based on 100% renewable electricity to the more objective one based on “renewable electricity plus decarbonised gases” (this is what I call a “Borchardt's turn”). This paved the way for re-opening the narrowing since 2014 (when Russia-EU Energy Dialogue was de facto stopped by the EU side) window of opportunities for EU-Russia energy cooperation within WS2 GAC as the only such “window” left for informal consultations between the two parties on important energy issues of mutual importance. This is when the prospective scenarios of EU-Russia cooperation in low-emission energy developments, including the multi-faceted hydrogen topic, came on top of the WS2 GAC agenda.

Shortly after Wim's appointment as the co-chair of WS2 GAC we wrote with him the discussion (position) paper which was aimed at mapping out the proposed way forward for WS2 GAC taking into account evolving developments. We considered that in this way this discussion paper might act as an informal updated ‘charter’ for GAC WS2. I remember this time as a very constructive and fruitful period of working with Wim – his intellectual brightness and cooperative approach made this drafting period a real “feast of the spirit”. We managed to put together, with the input from an ad-hoc ‘core team’ of senior energy specialists from both the EU and Russia, convened specifically for the purpose of providing advice, the vision of “Our current situation – where are we today”, of “Our dilemmas - what are we facing”, of “Our future - how could we move forward”, and presented 11 shared opinions on these segments of Russia-EU energy relations. We were really quite enthusiastic then with the result and began to work accordingly, but this lasted unfortunately only for two years.

It was an interesting story with Wim's appointment as a co-chair of WS2 GAC, a successor to Walter Boltz, his predecessor since the very beginning of the process. In late 2019 we discussed with Walter, when he informed me that he would leave, the potential candidates to succeed his position and Wim was on our short list. Then I went to Brussels on business and was to meet there with the Commission to discuss the potential appointee and our joint proposals with Walter. But before I started to introduce our short list, Klaus-Dieter Borchardt (Deputy Director General of DG ENERGY and the EU co-chair of GAC) informed me that it would be Wim. This means that independently we came to the same conclusion. This reflected, from my view, the level of mutual understanding. I then told this story to Wim while congratulating him with his appointment.

Wim's experience at Gate was very helpful for WS2 GAC within our topical low-emission agenda. It was, for instance, Wim's idea, that we discussed with him and that I later incorporated into the concept of proposed/prospective Russia's participation in the low-emission development of the EU based on development of low-emission/net-zero hydrogen from Russian gas. The latter would have had to be delivered to the EU where it could be converted into hydrogen either by methane steam reforming (MSR) with CCUS to neutralise emitted CO₂ (in the coastal EU "hydrogen valleys" areas), and/or by methane pyrolysis without CO₂ emissions (in the internal/continental EU "hydrogen valleys" areas)².

Based on his practical knowledge and experience both in Gasunie and as Managing Director of Gasunie/Vopac's Gate LNG import Terminal in Rotterdam, and as a President of GLE, Wim proposed that the "cold energy" from LNG regasification at the LNG EU import terminals in the northwest Europe can be effectively utilised by being used for liquefaction of CO₂ emitted by the MSR in the process of converting natural gas to hydrogen; then liquid CO₂ could be transported from the coastal EU area through the reversed North Sea pipelined to the depleted oil &/or gas fields in the middle of the North sea area and be sequestered there. This meant CO₂ would be buried there since under high pressure and temperature at the depth of former productive oil and gas horizons CO₂ would be mineralised and no longer present any climate threat.

We held our last (37th since 2011) WS2 GAC meeting in December 2021³ and began planning with Wim the next (38th) WS2 GAC meeting scheduled for early Spring 2022. Intensive preparation lasted until end-February. One of the topics that we agreed with Wim was to start discussion of potential cooperation in improvements of energy efficiency in buildings (especially important for multistory apartment houses in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe which low-energy-efficient constructive design have the same/similar historical origin from the former USSR/COMECON period), their renovation experience between the parties, which would have multiple positive effect both for final energy consumption and for climate change. Our German colleagues were very enthusiastic with this topic since they have much of the experience in this field since the unification of Germany. But the events developed differently.

Wim was a regular participant at the European Gas Conferences (EGC) which took place annually since 2007 in end-January in Vienna. His presentations there always attracted much attention. Our last in-person meeting with him was just there in January 2020 (by a coincidence, I travelled to Vienna then just from the funeral of another prominent participant in Russia-EU Gas Advisory Council - GAC co-speaker from the Russian side Vladimir Feygin⁴). In the margins of EGC-2020 three of us sat together – Klaus-Dieter Borchardt, Wim as a newly appointed co-chair of WS2 GAC from the EU side and me as regular co-chair of WS2 GAC from the Russian side – and we discussed the prospective programme of activities of WS2 GAC taking into consideration the realities of the time. After that meeting we have started with Wim preparation of our above-mentioned "discussion paper" – an informal 'charter' of WS2 GAC.

Through the long period of our previous contacts we all had good common understanding of the narrowing corridor for mutual cooperation and had been trying to stay within this limits (and to expand them as possible) to find draft solutions of the issues of mutual importance for the parties with clear understanding that both parties have quite different aims and starting positions and systems of arguments. And only the force of arguments does matter until and unless political decisions are taken. But nevertheless, both Russia and the EU have been interdependent on each other, they have been linked together with the cross-border immobile capital-intensive energy infrastructure, Russia's Gazprom has been a dominant player at the EU energy market and obtained its competitive niche in the EU energy in global competition. This means Russia and the EU were obliged to cooperate with the aim to find mutually acceptable energy solutions. That was the story and the vision that unfortunately came to its end quite abruptly and rather soon. I hope – no, I am quite sure – just temporarily.

I know that Wim had been trying to do his best to persuade colleagues from the Commission not to stop WS2 GAC process, but political developments suspended this process. And who knows for how long. The best memory for Wim would be if (rather: when) both the EU and Russia would restart their cooperation again for the mutual benefit of their citizens, as it happened in the past. But now it will happen within new realities and it will be new configuration of such cooperation, non- dependent current political fluctuations and strong statements. Wim has made his input in improving energy cooperation between the EU and Russia – and we should be thankful to him for this, And we will remember him for this as well.

Farewell, my dear Wim. Rest in peace.

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1. A.Konoplyanik. The prospects of a Black Sea/Danube small-scale LNG market, p.879- 881. – in: SE EUROPE ENERGY OUTLOOK 2021/2022, IENE, 2022, 1380 pp. Find [here](#).
2. A.Konoplyanik. Decarbonising European Gas: A New EU-Russia Partnership? // “Global Gas Perspectives”, 07 July 2020. Find [here](#). A.Konoplyanik. Gas Decarbonisation in Europe: Clean Hydrogen as the New Prospective Area for Russia-EU Cooperation. // OGEL Special Issue on “The Hydrogen Economy”, OGEL, February 2021, Vol. 19 - issue 2. Find [here](#). A.Konoplyanik. Key Aspects of the Seventh Energy Transition And Its Point of Divergence and Mutually Acceptable International Economic Solutions For Russia. // “Energy Systems Research”, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2021, p.30-45. Find [here](#).
3. All materials from the WS2 GAC meetings are available at its web-page at [here](#).
4. A.Konoplyanik. Dr. Vladimir Feygin: An Appreciation. // “Natural Gas News”, 29.01.2020. Find [here](#).