

Investing in change: How Crete is being transformed

Development - Tourism - Infrastructure - Energy



29 May 2026

Grand Arsenal - Conference Area, Chania

In partnership with

09:00 Registration – welcome coffee

09:30 Opening Remarks

Alasdair Ross, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist
Joan Hoey, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

09:40 Official Opening

H.E. Constantine An. Tassoulas, president of the Hellenic Republic

09:50 Opening Address

Stavros Arnautakis, governor of Crete

10:00 **The significance of Europe's connectivity in sustainable and long-term growth**

Keynote speech:

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, commissioner for sustainable transport and tourism, European Commission

10:10 **The strategic role of Crete for Greece's development**

Crete is evolving into a strategic hub powering Greece's growth across energy, investment, tourism, education, and innovation. Through major infrastructure upgrades, energy interconnections, and expanding renewable projects, the island is strengthening its position as a critical node in the national and regional economy. At the same time, Crete is attracting increasing interest from investors and innovation-driven sectors, reinforcing its role beyond a touristic destination. This discussion will examine how Crete can further consolidate its strategic importance, supporting Greece's long-term competitiveness, resilience and sustainable transition.

Kyriakos Pierrakakis, president of the Eurogroup, minister of economy and finance, Government of Greece (via connection)

10:20

Investing in Crete: business strategies for a growing island

This panel will highlight how businesses can leverage Crete's expanding infrastructure to drive growth and competitiveness by fostering collaboration to maximize regional and national economic impact.

Alexandros Exarchou, chairman and chief executive, AKTOR Group of Companies, chief executive, Atlantic see LNG Trade

Chaired by: **Niki Lymperaki**, journalist

10:30

Connecting Crete

Improved connectivity supports sustainable and long-term growth. This panel will explore how strategic transport projects can shape Crete's economic and social development.

The Economist in dialogue with:

Christos Dimas, minister of infrastructure and transport, Government of Greece

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

10:40

Doing business in a global landscape of challenges

Rapid geopolitical developments, most visibly in the Middle East, are disrupting energy networks and supply chains, with implications for regional economies. This session will explore how today's complex international environment affects economic resilience and what it signals for public policies and investment decisions at this critical juncture.

The Economist in dialogue with:

Giorgos Peristeris, chairman and chief executive, GEK TERNA Group

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

10:55

Networking break

11:20

Financing major infrastructure projects in Crete

As Crete enters a new phase of large-scale transformation, access to strategic financing has become central to delivering projects that will redefine the island's economic footprint. With major infrastructure developments such as the Northern Road Axis of Crete (BOAK) and the new Kasteli International Airport setting the pace for a new era of connectivity and competitiveness, significant capital is also being channeled into tourism upgrades, energy systems and export-oriented enterprise. This session will explore the mobilization of investment across sectors, while supporting a more diversified, resilient and future-ready growth model for Crete.

The Economist in dialogue with:

Vassilios Psaltis, chief executive, Alpha Bank

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

11:30

Maritime transport and connectivity

The Economist in dialogue with:

Kyriakos Mageiras, president, executive chairman of the Board of Directors, Attica Group

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

11:40

Tourism investments driving economic growth and development in Greece

Greece is entering a new phase of growth, with tourism investments playing a pivotal role in reshaping the country's economic landscape. New high-quality hospitality projects, upgraded infrastructure and strategic investments are enhancing the overall tourism offering while attracting strong international interest. This discussion will explore how these investments contribute to economic expansion, job creation and regional development while supporting Greece's transition towards a more sustainable, high-value tourism model with long-term impact on the national economy.

Olga Kefalogianni, minister of tourism, Government of Greece

Andreas Andreadis, chief executive, Sani / Ikos Group

Dimitris Gerogiannis, chief executive, Aegean Airlines

Steve Heapy, chief executive, Jet2.com and Jet2holidays

Gerasimos Skaltsas, chief commercial officer, SKY Express

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

12:30

Tourism, transport connectivity and innovation as drivers of Crete's regional growth

Crete is strengthening its position as a major tourism hub, supported by continuous improvements in transport infrastructure and connectivity. Upgraded airports, port facilities and inter-island and mainland links are making the island more accessible and increasing tourism flows throughout the year. In parallel, the agri-food sector is emerging as a key driver of Crete's regional growth, enhancing local value chains and enriching the island's tourism offering locally produced products that are increasingly central to the visitor experience. This discussion will explore how enhanced transport systems are directly supporting Crete's tourism growth and reinforce the island's role in Greece's broader economic development.

Angeliki Varela, president, Hellenic Tourism Organisation (GNTO)

Andreea Staicu, acting head of unit, Directorate-General for Transport and Mobility, European Commission

Alexandros Kikizas, chief executive, Melissa-Kikizas

Maria Deligianni, regional director, Eastern Mediterranean, CLIA

Michalis Sfakianakis, rector, University of Piraeus

Chaired by: **Joan Hoey**, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

13:20

Doing business in Crete

Infrastructure needs create opportunities for business development and business growth, in turn, drives infrastructure improvements. The following section explores the evolving investment prospects on the island of Crete.

The Economist in dialogue with:

Dinos Benroubi, vice chairman and chief executive, METKA

Chaired by: **Joan Hoey**, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

13:30

Major investments that are shaping Crete's future

Growth is driven by major infrastructure developments. Projects like the Northern Road Axis of Crete and the Kasteli airport aim to enhance Crete's profile both for its residents and for businesses operating on the island. The prime minister of Greece will outline the government's plan to modernize the southern tip of the country.

Guests of honour and keynote speakers:

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, prime minister of Greece

Mariana Mazzucato, professor of economics of innovation and public value, University College London

Co-chaired by:

Alasdair Ross, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

Joan Hoey, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

14:10

Financing regional growth: banking, investment and the future of Crete's economy

As Crete enters a new phase of economic transformation, financing and investment will play a critical role in supporting infrastructure, tourism, energy and sustainable development projects. This discussion will explore how the banking sector and financial policy can strengthen regional growth, attract investment and enhance the long-term resilience and competitiveness of Crete's economy.

Yannis Stournaras, governor, Bank of Greece (pre-recorded video)

14:20

Powering Crete: energy investments and interconnections

Energy infrastructure and renewable projects are transforming Crete's economic development and sustainability. Officials and industry leaders will examine how energy systems and interconnections support businesses, strengthen local communities and drive long-term growth, while highlighting opportunities for the island's energy transition.

On-stage dialogue:

Stavros Papastavrou, minister of environment and energy, Government of Greece

Yannis Tsakiris, vice-president, European Investment Bank

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

14:40

Networking lunch by Terra Creta

15:30

Education as a lever for regional development

The Economist in dialogue with:

Christina Paraskevopoulou, chief executive, Alphabet Education

Chaired by: **Joan Hoey**, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

15:40

Unlocking funding for Crete's development

How do you finance growth? This session will explore how public and private financing mechanisms are enabling major infrastructure, energy and tourism projects on Crete. Funding strategies, investment vehicles and risk management approaches that attract capital will be put in the spotlight.

Nikos Papathanasis, alternate minister of national economy and finance, Government of Greece

Martin Bijsterbosch, mission chief for Greece, European Central Bank

Sharing the banking perspective

Konstantinos Christodoulou, chief corporate banking officer, CrediaBank

Spyros Venetsianos, head of structured finance, general manager, Eurobank

Chaired by: **Joan Hoey**, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

16:15 **Ready for investment: on Crete's terms**

A case study by MRB

Dimitris Mavros, general manager, MRB Hellas

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

16:25 **Road safety and connectivity: rebuilding Crete's transport future**

Crete's economic growth and tourism performance rely heavily on a transport network that is both efficient and safe. Yet the island has long recorded high accident rates, underlining the urgent need for infrastructure upgrades and stronger road safety planning. In response, the Greek government has prioritised key interventions, from the advancement of the Northern Road Axis of Crete (BOAK) to targeted measures designed to improve traffic flow, junction safety and driver protection. This session will examine how safer roads and better connectivity are becoming essential to Crete's long-term development.

Konstantinos Kyranakis, alternate minister of transport, Government of Greece

Josef Schneider, chairman, European Passengers' Federation

Antonio Avenoso, executive director, European Transport Safety Council

Vassiliki Danelli-Mylona, president, Road Safety Institute "Panos Mylonas"

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

17:00 **Crete: connectivity, telecommunications and innovation transforming the island**

Crete's strategic location between Europe, Asia and Africa positions it as a key gateway for international connectivity. The island is steadily emerging as an important telecommunications hub linking three continents. Building on this momentum, the discussion will also explore how open innovation can serve as a key methodology to adapt and apply innovation across all sectors of the economy, accelerating digital transformation and fostering cross-sector collaboration on the island.

Vassilis Charmandaris, chairman, board of directors, Foundation for Research and Technology - Hellas (FORTH)

Ioannis Konstantinidis, chief strategy, transformation and wholesale officer, OTE Group

Nikos Plevris, head of transmission and transport Networks, Vodafone

Itai Green, co-founder and chief executive, Global Innovation and Strategy Consulting, author, *"Innovation or Elimination"*

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

17:35

Local leadership, regional growth

How can municipal and regional authorities foster investment to drive Crete's economic development? This panel will explore the pivotal role of local government's strategic planning, infrastructure initiatives, and support for business and tourism projects.

Nikos Tachiaos, deputy minister of infrastructure, Government of Greece

Alexis Kalokairinos, mayor of Heraklion

Panagiotis Simandirakis, mayor of Chania

Giorgis Marinakis, mayor of Rethymno

Chaired by: **Joan Hoey**, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

18:10

Energy, mineral resources and the circular economy: driving Crete's sustainable transition

Energy investments, mineral resources and the circular economy are emerging as key drivers of Crete's development trajectory. From renewable energy projects and strategic interconnections to modern waste management, recycling systems and the sustainable utilisation of natural and mineral resources, the island is advancing towards a more resilient, competitive and resource-efficient growth model. At the same time, Greek companies are playing a vital role in supporting the energy transition, strengthening resource efficiency and contributing to Crete's long-term economic and environmental sustainability.

Ioannis Maniatis, chief asset management and maintenance officer, ADMIE

Dimitrios Kontaxis, general manager of circular economy, Motor Oil Group, vice-president, Thalys Environmental Services

Chaired by: **Joan Hoey**, Greece analyst and Europe consultant, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

18:30

Culture as infrastructure: driving sustainable growth in Crete

A matter of identity and heritage preservation, but also a strategic growth asset. Cultural capital is at the core of a development model that combines tourism, local production, creativity, and quality of life. This session will explore how cultural heritage can drive sustainable growth in Crete and the Mediterranean.

The Economist in dialogue with:

Lina Mendoni, minister of culture of Greece

Chaired by: **Alasdair Ross**, countries editor, *The World Ahead*, The Economist

18:40

Official closing address:

Kostis Hatzidakis, vice-president, Government of Greece

19:00

End of conference

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