

Energy union set to empower EU's energy security

Written by Maroš Šefčovič on 26 April 2016 in Feature
Feature

2016 will be the year of delivery for Energy Union, writes Maroš Šefcovic.



As we all know, in a modern society, energy is not a luxury or a privilege; it's a necessity, sometimes an existential one. And yet, in the EU most of our energy is imported from elsewhere in the world, sometimes from regions which are unstable.

As a Slovak, I will never forget the winter of 2009 when gas supply to the country was halted altogether. This is a situation we cannot afford to live with any longer.

That is why I was proud to present the European Commission's legislative package on our Security of Energy Supply two months ago, as part of the Energy Union Strategy. By reducing our energy demand, and by better managing our supply from external sources - we are delivering on our promise of enhancing the stability of Europe's energy market.

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Our overarching goal in this legislative package was therefore to decrease our market's dependence on a few suppliers by diversifying our sources and by promoting alternative technologies. The emerging global market liquefied natural gas (LNG) opens an entire sea of opportunities for additional suppliers.

I say 'sea of opportunities' because LNG is shipped across the seas and requires us in Europe to prepare the necessary ports and terminals to join this market. Expanding our LNG trade is one example out of many.

Other solutions include reverting to smart technologies which allow us to store energy more efficiently, or ensuring that neighbouring EU countries can quickly provide each other with natural gas in case of shortages.

The package also provides new ways to ensure that we all play by the same rules; that all contracts with third countries respect EU law and ensures that European energy importers have more information so they can negotiate better deals for their customers.

But the Package is not only about the security of our supply. It is also about the efficiency of our energy consumption. This week, I will represent the European Commission at the signing ceremony of the Paris Agreement in New York, four months after world leaders reached a historic global, legally binding agreement for fighting climate change.

The Commission's new strategy to make our heating and cooling more efficient is therefore a natural follow-up to Europe's global commitment to reduce CO2 emissions.

Why is this so important? Because half of Europe's energy consumption is used for heating and cooling in buildings, and because this number can be greatly reduced.

By installing proper insulation, for example, we can reduce heating needs by 70 per cent. The strategy is ambitious; it envisions that by 2050 emissions from buildings will be reduced, not by half or two-thirds but to nearly zero.

By using smart technologies and smart financing, Europeans can still enjoy adequate home temperatures, but without over spending on their energy bills and without over polluting the environment.

I am very much looking forward to discussing the Security of Energy Supply Package and the previous Energy Union packages, with our co-legislators in the European Parliament and Council. Meanwhile, we in the Commission intend to maintain the pace of our Energy Union proposals, making 2016 the Year of Delivery.

About the author

Maroš Šefčovič is European Commission Vice-President for Energy Union

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