

Energy security: EU needs to be prepared for a crisis

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Opinion

After years of difficult talks, the EU is finally moving towards securing its energy supplies, explains Pavel Telička.



Pavel Telička | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

We need to be prepared for an energy crisis. Security of gas supply is one of the EU's key objectives.

New measures to safeguard the security of gas supply passed a first reading in plenary earlier this month. This was the first step on the road to EU energy security and significant impetus for cooperation, security and transparency of energy contracts. The negotiations also highlighted some of the Union's main problems and gaps.

Stress tests which took place in 2014 proved that the EU lacks sufficient mechanisms to tackle crises such as the one that occurred in 2009.

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The dispute between Ukraine and Russia interrupted gas supplies to several EU countries. Natural gas represents about a quarter of all energy used by the member states.

Many countries import almost all of their gas supplies and many strongly depend on a single gas source or gas pipeline. Slashing these supplies could have fatal consequences. That is why security of supply is one of the most urgent issues the Union currently faces.

As a shadow rapporteur, I have been involved in many lengthy and politically demanding negotiations on this dossier.

The main objective of the new regulation is to secure gas supply to EU citizens in the event of a crisis, which may occur, according to statistics, once every 20 years or in cases of extraordinarily high demand for at least 30 days. The new rules are based on three basic aspects.

First, it is necessary to improve coordination and cooperation between member states, which requires a shift of competences from national to regional level. The regulation introduces mandatory regional prevention action and emergency plans to enhance cooperation at regional level.

Another key element of this regulation is a principle of solidarity between member states, needed to ensure the security of supply. This principle is designed to address extreme situations guaranteeing supplies to a restricted group of 'solidarity protected customers'.

Yet, solidarity is a last-resort measure used in cases when supplies can't be secured by other market measures or can't be provided against a fair compensation.

The third point is the transparency of the gas market. The European Commission should automatically be notified of key gas supply contracts. This obligation applies to contracts covering the equivalent of 28 per cent or more of the national market.

This will strengthen energy security and, prevent contracts from being concluded without our knowledge of whether they will affect us and how. These were among our key priorities for the negotiations.

The European Parliament played a very important role in the negotiations, together with the European Commission. Despite Parliament's unity, difficulties arose in the Council, which delayed the new regulation.

Discussions about energy union and a functioning energy market have been ongoing for years. Those of us who took part in the negotiations know how difficult this process was. There were numerous

obstructions by the Council, and we had a very difficult round of talks due to lack of transparency.

Some member states still feel that they would do better negotiating on their own. They do not feel the urge to move towards a real energy union and the opening of the internal market. New measures to safeguard reliable gas supplies are part of the energy package presented by the European Commission in February 2015.

Similarly, the new clean energy package, published by the Commission in 2016, introduced a proposal on risk-preparedness in the electricity sector to establish common rules on crisis prevention and crisis management in the power sector. The EU is moving towards more safeguards and cooperation mechanisms in case of a crisis. Hopefully they will never be used.

About the author

Pavel Telička (CZ) is Parliament's ALDE group shadow rapporteur on measures to safeguard the security of gas supply

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