R16 ENERGY INDEPENDENCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE: Towards a truly interconnected and sustainable energy market

Proposer: DWARS, GroenLinkse Jongeren; Jong Groen

Agenda item: 4. Resolutions

Motion text

Since the creation of the European Union, energy has been a crucial aspect of the European integration process, to the point that two of the three founding Treaties revolve around the energy sector. In Articles 114 and 194 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union it is stated that Union policy on energy shall aim, in a spirit of solidarity between Member States, to ensure security of energy supply in the Union and promote the interconnection of energy networks. The European Union (EU) also believes that the promotion and protection of human rights around the world is a legitimate concern of the international community. The EU is bound by its Treaty to promote human rights, democratization and development.

Currently, the European energy market is regulated according to the TEN-E regulation, which allows the Union to meet its core energy objectives by laying down rules for identifying and the developing Projects of Common Interest (PCIs). These will ensure the interoperability of trans-European energy networks, the functioning of the internal energy market, the security of supply and the integration of renewable forms of energy.

Despite this, however, the current energy markets in Europe are still very regionalized. In part, this is due to a lack of energy infrastructure connecting Member States. Improving the interconnectivity of the energy market has several benefits: improved security supply, increased efficiency and increased competitiveness. This aligns well with the energy strategy that EU has stated previously, which is based on the pillars of securing an expanding supply of energy from both domestic and foreign sources, developing a more competitive internal energy market, and encouraging and supporting environmental protection and development of clean and renewable energy sources. Additionally, the new energy market of the EU is expected to encourage diversification and flexibility to react to market conditions across the countries. It also provides a more powerful bargaining position for European energy companies when sourcing energy in global markets, since there is a larger range of options available with regard to supply routes and there is better access to customers.

It is acknowledged that the EU has committed to comply to standards of democracy and to support human rights in foreign relations, in accordance with the founding principles of the Union itself, that is the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. Given its current dependence on multiple energy suppliers, however, the EU’s ability to promote its interests and values risks to be limited when energy imports are supplied by countries with different values, even countries that violate human rights. Human rights are considered of vital importance to the EU, but when it comes to energy imports suddenly not.

While the Treaty on the European Union states that foreign policy should 'consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, [and] human rights', the European Union has been criticised for putting its needs for energy imports before the aforementioned values: in accord with a study by the NGO Freedom House, Norway is the only country out of the EU’s main oil and gas suppliers to meet international standards of democracy, unlike the remainder (Nigeria, assessed as “partly free”, and Russia, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Qatar which are defined as authoritarian states). Moreover, some if not most of these countries have been known to violate human rights, in the energy sector, but outside of that as well. By importing energy from these countries, these regimes profit from European money, which does nothing to stop the abuse of human rights by these regimes. However, it is possible to change the EU energy market. For example, the European Parliament has instated several sanctions against Russia and is debating issuing even heavier sanctions, but is yet to accept an energy boycott at the moment of writing. Clearly, it is possible for countries in and outside the EU to take action against authoritarian governments when it comes to upholding our values, including the respect for (fundamental) human rights.

Not only would the European Union benefit from an increased energy independence in reference to human rights and democracy, it would also strengthen energy security and contribute profitably to the project of decarbonisation of the energy sector. It is time to clearly condemn dependence on energy imported from countries with authoritarian regimes and that contribute to the violations of fundamental human rights.

It should be noted that this resolution focuses on energy independence, and does not directly address energy poverty, since a resolution about this was accepted during the 2020 General Assembly. Although there is not one common definition of energy poverty between Member States, it is generally described as a situation in which households are unable to access essential energy services. Since energy poverty is usually experienced or measured at the household level, it is not directly addressed in this resolution. However, stronger and better-connected energy infrastructure can go a long way in reducing energy poverty.

The Federation of Young European Greens, with regards to the goals expressed in

the EU Green Deal, calls on the EU and the governments of Member States to:

1. Develop a legislative and policy framework to create a more interconnected European energy market to assist and support the energy transition towards renewable sources, with the aim of further improving storage and transfer capacity and reducing costs and therefore prices in order to achieve energy independence, by:

    1. Granting the European Parliament, Commission and Council the legislative authority to regulate the energy market and energy infrastructure supranationally through EU legislation;

    2. Initiating the grounds for legislation to regulate the international European energy market and improve supranational connection between energy markets of Member States, for example by establishing an independent body to compile and assess the current bilateral energy trade agreements between Member States and third countries, and to assess the deficits and strengths in the energy infrastructure of each Member State;

2. Based on this framework, to implement and develop an interconnected and improved energy infrastructure in Europe, as achieving this is an essential step to ensure a functional and efficient European energy market, as well as a necessity for more sustainable energy supply, by:

    1. Investing in and facilitating the building of more energy infrastructure in and between Member States with significant infrastructure deficits to enable improved storage and sharing of energy, such as but not limited to flexible power grids, better demand-response technology, electric vehicle charging, and energy storage;

    2. Investing in improving energy infrastructure where it already exists;

    3. Implementing the connection of energy infrastructure across Member States in order to facilitate the creation of a European energy network;

    4. Investing in and stimulating research on sustainable technologies such as, but not limited to, energy reduction, energy storage and energy production;

    5. Offering targeted assistance and investment support to ensure energy infrastructure has similar quality across Member States.

With regards to the violation of human rights by the governments of nations such as, but not limited to, the Russian Federation, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, calls on the EU and the governments of Member States to:

1. Condemn in the strongest terms the violation of human rights by authoritarian governments of energy-exporting nations;

2. Based on these violations of human rights to aim for independence from importing energy from these nations via the ending of current energy trade agreements as soon as possible;

3. Henceforth ensure that any future energy trade agreement is contingent to a set of minimal standards including but not limited to respect of human rights and rule of law wherein:

    1. Nations that breach the most egregious violations of human rights will no longer be considered as viable options to import energy from, whereas

    2. Nations that fall short of meeting the minimal standards yet abiding by a commitment to improve their respect for, among others, human rights and rule of law will be considered, and

    3. The assessment of the fulfilment of said criteria will be conducted by an independent body.