

The European Union's increasing energy dependency on a limited number of countries (a fact highlighted by the gas crisis between the Ukraine and Russia in early 2009) has strengthened the need for a more coherent and integrated foreign energy policy for the European Union. This policy must address three interrelated objectives: competitiveness, sustainability and security of supply.

Energy Policy for Europe (EPE)

The European Union has been active in the energy industry for a long time, but the spring of 2009 was a milestone in European energy policy. The heads of state and government of all EU Member States decided at the time that the EU must have an integrated climate and energy policy, thus laying the foundation for the Energy Policy for Europe.

The Energy Policy for Europe has three main objectives:

- increasing the security of energy supply;
- guaranteeing the competitiveness of European economies and the availability of affordable energy;
- promoting the sustainability of the environment and combating climate change.

To implement the EPE, an Energy Action Plan was presented for the period 2007-2009. The Plan focuses on five sub-sectors:

- single market for gas and electricity;
- security of supply;
- international energy policy;
- energy-efficiency and renewable energy sources;
- energy technologies.

In line with a new European energy strategy, work is currently underway on a second Energy Action Plan for the period 2011-2020, which will focus on:

- modern, integrated energy networks;
- low-carbon energy systems;
- technological innovation;
- a strong and coordinated external energy policy;
- affordable and high-quality energy for all EU citizens.

Finally, a special section on energy (Art. 194) has been incorporated into the Treaty of Lisbon setting out the key objectives of the energy policy: healthy energy markets, security of energy supply, energy efficiency and interconnection of energy networks. For the first time it mentions the EU having its own legal basis for energy and it also sets out the principle of solidarity, whereby a country that is facing severe problems with its energy supply will be helped by other EU countries.

Relations with non-EU countries

The European Union is also pursuing intensive dialogues with many countries and regions that are important for the supply of energy. Of these countries Russia is the most important, because of its position as the largest energy supplier (oil and gas) to the European Union. The EU's objective is to establish strong cooperation with Russia, based on the principles of transparency, fair competition, reciprocity and non-discrimination. The aim is to guarantee energy security for the European Union through mechanisms, dialogue and agreements. In doing so it is very important that the European Union speaks with one voice.

The European Union is also working closely with the United States of America on energy issues, principally through the EU-US Energy Council established in November 2009. The council aims to intensify coordination of transatlantic energy policy, to consult about strategic energy issues of mutual interest and to strengthen cooperation on energy research, especially sustainable and low-carbon energy technologies.

The EU is also working on energy issues with the following countries: Brazil, China, India, Iraq, Norway, Algeria, Ukraine and South Africa. It is also working with the countries around the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea via the Baku initiative and other arrangements.

Pipelines and infrastructure work

Given that the European Union is largely dependent on energy imports, an adequate pipeline infrastructure between the European Union and energy producing countries is an essential factor for guaranteeing energy security. To this end, the European Union is endeavouring to establish an external energy policy based on diversification of suppliers and supply routes. The major pipeline projects are Europe's Nabucco gas pipeline (linking the Caspian Sea region to the EU), Russia's South Stream gas pipeline (linking Russia to the EU) and Russia's North Stream gas pipeline (linking Russia to Germany), which entered its construction phase on 9 April 2010.

Calendar of events

6-7 September 2010

Informal Energy Council (Brussels)

24 September 2010

Ministerial Council on the Energy Community (Skopje)

September 2010

Nabucco Conference (Brussels)

27 October 2010

Eastern Partnership Energy Security Platform (Brussels)

28-29 October 2010

European Council (Brussels)

13-14 October 2010 & 15-16 December 2010

International Energy Agency (IEA) Governing Councils

23 November 2010

Tenth Anniversary EU-Russia Energy Dialogue (Brussels)

18 November 2010

EU-US Energy Council

December 2010

Ministerial Energy Charter

2-3 December 2010

Formal Energy Council (Brussels)

16-17 December 2010

European Council (Brussels)