

Informal Energy Council: "Fuelling a secure, low-carbon and affordable energy future for Europe"

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Brussels is hosting the Informal Energy Council on 6 and 7 September 2010. This informal ministerial meeting will focus on three issues: consumer protection, the infrastructure package and energy efficiency. On this occasion Commissioner Oettinger will also report on the progress of the reflections regarding the safety of offshore oil rigs. Finally, the EU Ministers will discuss the succession to the executive director of the International Energy Agency.

Today's debates were about the consumer-related aspects of the EU's energy policy.

After a decade of liberalisation of Europe's energy markets and in particular following Mario Monti's report on the internal market, the Ministers for Energy have commonly stated the lack of consideration for the consumers' interests. E.g., with respect to billing, the choice of suppliers, or the possibility to call on an ombudsman in the event of a dispute.

Moreover, 2010 being the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the Belgian Presidency has seized this opportunity to examine, at ministerial level, the growing phenomenon of energy poverty. At present more than 50 million Europeans (i.e. the lowest estimate) cannot maintain an appropriate level of comfort in their home, struggle with unpaid energy bills or cannot invest a minimum in energy efficiency. This challenge however, though the toughest one to face in the light of the 2020 horizon, is the most essential instrument to combat energy poverty in a sustainable way.

Following today's exchanges and debates, the Presidency has concluded that this issue must remain at the top of the European policy agenda and must work actively to educate and inform the consumers. The Presidency has welcomed the Commission's proposal to draw up a report with a view to the Energy Council of 2 December 2010, which will aim to:

- Work out a framework definition of the vulnerable consumer.
- Harmonise at EU level, the statistical methods in order to better quantify the extent of energy poverty.
- Make up a list of existing and future European energy policies likely to contribute, either directly or indirectly, to the consumers' interests being taken into account in the field of energy policy and put into place a mechanism for the exchange of best and worst practices between Member States.
- Set up a panel of energy ombudsmen (round table) whose mission would be to discuss synergies in terms of consumer protection. This could happen within the framework of the "London Citizens' Forum".