Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1434 (2005)[1]

Europe's growing energy vulnerability

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Most European countries are experiencing growing energy consumption and increasing dependence on the importation of fossil fuels. The Parliamentary Assembly views this with concern, especially against the background of rising global competition over primary energy resources driven by economic development and population growth, as well as by Europe's ambitious, and timely, environmental commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. Moreover, the recent surge in the price of oil (and, as a result, of gas and coal) and geopolitical uncertainties as regards the continuity of sufficient oil supplies add to Europe's energy vulnerability.

2. Fossil fuels – especially oil, natural gas and coal – are the dominant sources of Europe's energy consumption and their use will continue to grow in the coming decades unless policy measures are taken to reverse the trend. As oil and gas supplies from the North Sea are projected to decline considerably over the next few years and as European coal is becoming too costly to produce, increasing amounts of these resources will have to be imported from more distant regions, especially from the Asian parts of the Russian Federation, and from the Middle East, the Caspian Sea region and Africa.

3. The economic and political implications of such a growing European dependence on fossil fuel imports are considerable over the medium term, and of even greater concern when seen in the perspective of the next several decades, when global reserves of fossil fuels are expected to diminish dramatically. Four-fifths of Europe's own fossil fuel reserves are coal and other solid fuels which will remain an important back-up source for generating electricity, even as coal mining and the use of coal in power stations decline. There are currently few real substitutes for oil in transport, the largest oil-consuming sector, even though the use of bio-fuels is strongly promoted at European Union level and the development of hydrogen-driven fuel cells looks promising. If the price of oil rises further, these new energy forms will become increasingly competitive.

4. Electricity, as a secondary source of energy, is increasingly valued because of its high quality. However, since the burning of oil and coal for its production causes considerable pollution, more and more European countries are switching to gas-fired power generation which causes fewer emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Nuclear energy – considered relatively clean from the emissions viewpoint but more problematic as regards the management of waste, operational safety and protection against terrorist attacks – has polarised opinions across Europe. Stricter operational standards, reinforced safety, new technologies and better communication with the public may well render nuclear energy more acceptable – especially in view of the need to preserve the competitiveness of European industries and to meet environmental commitments – until such time as vast amounts of clean and safe energy at competitive prices may become available via thermonuclear fusion.

5. The Assembly views the European Union's Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme, scheduled to start in 2005, as an important tool for achieving a lasting reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, especially in western Europe where, despite certain efforts, levels are well above the European average.

6. The Assembly regrets that renewable energy sources – including solar, wind, hydro- and geothermal energies as well as biomass, biofuels, hydrogen and combustible waste – are on the whole underutilised in Europe despite their considerable potential. The European Union's resolve to increase the share of renewables in its total energy consumption to 12% by 2010, and to achieve a 5.75% biofuel substitution for

1. Assembly debate on 26 April 2005 (10th Sitting) (see Doc. 10458, report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur : Mr Berceanu). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 April 2005 (10th Sitting).

fossil fuels in transport in the same period, is commendable and should serve as a benchmark also for countries outside this area. However, renewable energy sources will not provide a complete answer to the reality of a steadily increasing energy demand.

7. As the opening of energy markets across Europe adds pressure on individual countries to review the relationship between the state and the various energy enterprises, it is high time to debate and make informed political choices – starting with the European Union and its internal energy market – regarding priority areas of action in support of research, resource development, strategic reserves, investment in power generation, network infrastructure and regulation at pan-European level. At the same time, a country-specific mix of energy resources reflecting the national situation is desirable for individual countries, as are efforts to reduce reliance on any one type of energy or a single supplier, especially in central and eastern Europe.

8. The Assembly refers to its Resolution 1413 (2004) on avoiding electricity blackouts in Europe, in which it maintains that substantial energy savings can be reached throughout Europe without impairing living standards or industrial output. This is essential for stabilising energy demand in Europe through further improvements in energy end-use efficiency and greater incentives for energy savings in the transport, power and construction sectors.

9. Given the limited indigenous energy resources in most European countries, Europe has a vital interest in intensifying the energy dialogue with its closest partners in order to minimise the physical, economic and political risks to the security of energy supplies for both importing and exporting countries. In the Council of Europe area, this implies strengthening long-term energy co-operation with, amongst others, the Russian Federation and the countries in the Caspian Sea region. The Assembly in this context reiterates its call, contained in Resolution 1324 (2003) on Europe and the development of energy resources in the Caspian Sea region, for the countries concerned to secure the best use of their energy resources by reaching early agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, ratifying the Energy Charter Treaty and its Protocol on Energy Efficiency and Related Environmental Aspects and by concluding the negotiations for a transit protocol.

10. The Assembly in conclusion calls on the member states of the Council of Europe :

to jointly shape coherent pan-European framework policies permitting greater energy savings and a gradual shift toward alternative sources of energy, including biofuels and hydrogen-driven fuel cells for use in hybrid vehicles, in order to replace the rapidly diminishing reserves of fossil fuels ;

to engage in the modernisation of coal-fired plants currently in operation and to develop further "clean coal" technologies and carbon sequestration techniques ;

against the background of the growing scarcity of fossil fuels and stricter environmental constraints under the Kyoto process, to renew consideration, where applicable, of their policies on nuclear energy ;

to pursue joint research on thermonuclear fusion and to allocate the necessary financial resources for building the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER project) ;

to ensure adequate safety measures for the long-term disposal of highly radioactive nuclear waste and to encourage a debate on the development of regional repositories ;

to invest additional resources in the development of new technologies for the enhanced use of renewable energy sources, in particular biofuels ;

to support and participate in the European Union's Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme ;

to agree on priority areas for joint energy research, resources development, strategic reserves, investment in generation and network infrastructure and regulatory frameworks ;

to ensure that energy prices better reflect the real cost of this resource to society, induce energy-saving behaviour and ensure fairer competition between different sources of energy ;

to draw up national energy saving plans, disseminate energy-efficient technologies, remedy the imbalance between different modes of transport and implement more energy saving measures in buildings.