

Energy

³ Lighting, ² heating, ¹ transport, industrial output: energy is vital for essential day-to-day services, without which we and our businesses cannot function. Europe's stocks of fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal) will not, however, last forever. They need to be judiciously managed while we look into new sources of energy. Europe is ~~producing~~, and importing, increasing quantities of energy. EU countries are well aware of the advantages of coordinated action in this ~~highly~~ strategic field. This has led to common rules throughout Europe and a pooling of Europe's efforts to secure the ~~energy~~ that it needs at an affordable price, while generating the least possible pollution.

A complex sector/

Turning on ~~the television~~ or starting our cars are actions that we take for granted, yet they represent the final stage of a complex process. First of all, energy resources, such as gas, oil and coal, have to be extracted from the ground. Wood can also/ be converted into heat, and electricity generated from wind, water and sunlight by using wind turbines/ dams and solar panels. This energy then has to be transported, sometimes/ across continents or under the

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sea, to the place where it will be used. That requires power plants capable of producing an uninterrupted energy supply for many ~~years~~. Massive technical, logistical and financial resources are therefore involved.

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Energy is a strategic sector because we cannot do without it. It is vital for lighting, protecting against the cold and transporting people and goods, and it also underpins all the sectors of the economy ~~— agriculture, industry and services —~~ as well as ~~scientific progress~~. Our standard of living requires high amounts of energy, and that obviously generates pollution (air, water, soil and climate) whose impact needs to be reduced as much as possible.

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Climate constraints

Leading experts have demonstrated what the ~~exorbitant~~ cost of climate change will be if the world does not succeed in reducing its ~~CO₂~~ emissions. The energy sector is directly involved here as over ~~70~~ % of its output comes from fossil fuels, which emit carbon dioxide (CO₂), the main greenhouse gas, when they are burnt. In the future, ~~that~~, the European energy sector will have to cut down on fossil fuels and make much more use of low-carbon energy sources.

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Europe must act together

The importance that ~~EU countries~~ attach to the energy sector is nothing new. Its relevance was recognised immediately after Second World War, when the founding fathers of the ~~European Union~~ resolved to 'place the instruments of war at the service of peace', to use the words of Jean Monnet. Coal and steel and atomic energy were the starting point for the first European treaties: the European Coal and Steel Community ~~(ECSC)~~ Treaty, which was mainstreamed into EU policy in ~~1999~~, and the Euratom Treaty on atomic energy, which still is in force today.

In the ~~1970s~~, ~~EU~~ countries realised that they had to work together to resolve energy supply problems. As a result, they pooled strategic oil stocks and set up a crisis-management procedure. Nowadays, energy policy also has an impact on many other fields: industry, environment, ² transport, ⁵ research and ⁴ innovation, and ³ even external relations.

How the EU goes about it

Europe currently has to import ~~over~~ half of its energy because it has few energy reserves. And it has to accept the price decided by world markets or ~~even~~ by individual supply countries. A powerful way to cut our energy bill is to reduce

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the amount of energy that we consume.

That may seem obvious. But ~~we can~~ consume less while ~~keeping~~ our living standards and modern conveniences/

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Saving energy

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Reducing our energy consumption is no easy matter, but the answer is yes: by using energy in better and more efficient ways. A win-win solution is ~~not~~ possible:

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CO₂ emissions can be reduced and we can create ⁴ new ⁵ jobs ⁶ and ³ save ¹ money ² by

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becoming less dependent on energy imports. ~~Moreover, we have the~~

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~~opportunity to export our expertise~~

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Energy efficiency is therefore one of the ~~European Union's~~ main objectives.

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A genuine European energy market

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In ~~general~~, electricity and gas can flow freely though the grids which criss-cross the ~~EU~~. In a single European energy market, all ³ producers ⁴ and ² suppliers ¹ compete with one another. In theory, it is there ~~from~~ possible to buy and sell electricity and gas wherever one wants, the aim being to obtain high-quality energy at the most competitive price.

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However, this market of 500 ~~000 000~~ consumers has ~~still~~ to become a reality because a series of national rules hamper the development of cross-border energy businesses. The prices of gas and

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electricity for businesses, set by governments, are just one example. ~~Many~~ players ~~also~~ have privileged and unfair access to energy grids. Investors are therefore deterred because the outlook is not very promising. As a consequence, the regeneration of power plants that have become outdated could be delayed. Competition needs therefore to be enhanced and common rules need to be introduced on the equitable use of grids. The European Union has a leading role to play here, both in setting the common rules and in ~~strictly~~ supervising markets to prevent certain players from unjustly exploiting any kind of monopoly.

Up-to-date energy ~~needs~~

Energy grids also need to be modernised and developed in order to cope with the ~~increasing~~ demand for energy, to diversify existing resources and to make the market more fluid.

However, it still takes too long to obtain the permits needed for grid projects. The European Union therefore encourages the development and modernisation of energy grids in order to speed up the construction of any 'missing links', especially in eastern Europe. The role of the European Union should not just be one of overall coordination; in some cases it can financially support

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certain ~~plans~~ which are essential but involve too many economic risks for businesses and countries alone.

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Consumers are central to concerns

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The ~~ultimate~~ aim of EU energy policy is to benefit consumers, be they individuals or ~~small or large~~ companies. Consumers have rights and ~~should~~ be better informed about them in order to make the most of the opportunities offered by the ~~internal~~ energy market. They should for instance be able to: switch supplier ~~without problems~~, receive straightforward and comparable bills and offers, find out where their electricity has come from and receive information on their consumption at any moment.

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Excerpt from:

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