European Parliament
2019-2024

Committee on Petitions

12.9.2023

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Subject: **Petition No 1166/2022 by R. K. (Polish), on behalf of 70 students from Liceum im. Z. Herberta w Słubicach, Gauß Gymnasium in Frankfurt am Oder, Rouanet-Gymnasium in Beeskow and Katholische Schule Salvator in Berlin, signed by 70 other persons, on climate protection and energy transition**

1. Summary of petition

On 13 October 2022, at the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, the petitioner took part in the Polish-German student debate on the European Green Deal. He calls for independence from fossil energy carriers and authoritarian states as soon as possible. To this end, he suggests the diversification of energy supply and the transition to renewable energy sources, and not to qualify nuclear energy as green energy only as transitional energy. According to the petitioner, this is justified by the issue of radioactive waste, for which there is still no possibility of final disposal. He proposes to introduce a certain percentage of GDP paid by countries to expand renewable energy and maintain nuclear energy. The percentage should be higher for countries with nuclear power plants. He backs the pursuit of political, ecological and economic unity and cooperation in the energy transition. This should be guaranteed, for example, through the European energy grid, which includes energy compensation between countries. This would ensure energy security throughout Europe. The petitioner proposes to financially support photovoltaics and to conduct a wide-ranging information campaign on it, and other renewable energy sources. This information campaign should take place in settlements, schools, especially for seniors, homeowners and through nationwide promotional campaigns on radio and television. In view of the petitioner, the state should pay 25 % of the purchase price of a new solar cell. Companies should be allowed to conduct seminars on renewable energy.

2. Admissibility

Declared admissible on 21 March 2023. Information requested from Commission under Rule 227(6).

3. Commission reply, received on 12 September 2023

The Commission supports the petitioner's call for more energy independence and a higher share of renewable energy in the EU. Its REPower EU plan of May 2022 set out the basis for weaning the EU off the dependency on Russian fossil fuels and to increase the share of renewable energy. Since then, the diversification efforts made last year have allowed us to reduce Russian gas supplies to the EU and will continue in the coming months. Imports from Russia have fallen from ca. 150 bcm in [2021] before the war to 80 bcm in 2022 and further towards estimated 50 bcm in 2023).

Furthermore, a provisional agreement was found between the European Parliament and the Council to increase the binding share of renewable energy in the EU to 42.5% (with an indicative target of 45%) by 2030, up from approximately 22% in 2021. The new legislative framework includes several new or strengthened measures to reach this ambitious goal.

As regards nuclear and the taxonomy, it should be stressed that the EU Taxonomy Delegated Act[1] includes a broad range of renewable technologies recognising their contribution to the climate mitigation objective. It then also includes[2] certain nuclear energy related activities as transitional activities, in line with the petitioner's view. These activities can qualify as taxonomy-aligned for a limited time and subject to complying with strict cumulative technical screening criteria of nuclear and environmental safety (also related to radioactive waste disposal).

On the petitioner's proposal for payments for the development of renewable energy based on GDP, it must be noted that the EU legal framework on renewable energy and the achievement of its overall EU target builds on national contributions of Member States. It is, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, left to the Member States with which policies and measures they want to achieve their national contribution. The level of the national contributions are based on different factors, including, but not exclusively, on GDP. The country's respective renewables' potential and the existing share of renewables are other important factors in this context. Requiring specific payments would be in contradiction with the subsidiarity principle.

On solar PV, the Commission agrees that there is a need to accelerate the deployment of solar energy, as set out in REPower EU plan and the Solar Strategy, but it remains up to the Member States' on how to support solar PV, and if they want to use specific support schemes and information campaigns. Overall, it can be observed that there is already a great interest among companies and citizens to install solar panels, motivated by the fight against climate change, high electricity prices and the need to wean ourselves off Russian fossil fuels.

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[1] Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2139 of 4 June 2021 supplementing Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council by establishing the technical screening criteria for determining the conditions under which an economic activity qualifies as contributing substantially to climate change mitigation or climate change adaptation and for determining whether that economic activity causes no significant harm to any of the other environmental objectives, OJ L 442, 9.12.2021, p. 1–349.

[2] Through amendments introduced by Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/1214 of 9 March 2022 amending Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2139 as regards economic activities in certain energy sectors and Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2178 as regards specific public disclosures for those economic activities, OJ L 188, 15.7.2022, p. 1–45.

As regards The Trans-European Energy Regulation (TEN-E) sets out the process of selecting key infrastructure projects. Those projects considered as Projects of Common Interest (PCI) and Projects of Mutual Interest (PMI) benefit, among other things, from accelerated permitting procedures and can apply for funds provided by the Connecting Europe Facility.

As regards to cooperation and a European energy, it is thanks to the Trans-European Energy Networks policy and financial support provided by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), cohesion funds, and other instruments, that several critical infrastructure electricity and gas projects in Central and South-Eastern Europe have come online, making the EU energy system more resilient to disruption. Before the outbreak of the crisis, the dependencies of Member States on Russian gas supply had already been significantly reduced via several key PCIs strengthening security of supply and diversification of supply routes. Once the currently planned key gas infrastructure projects are completed, all Member States will have direct or indirect access to the global LNG market, and most Member States will have access to at least three sources of supply or global LNG markets.

The revised TEN-E that entered into force in 2022 includes updated infrastructure categories and priority corridors in full alignment with the climate neutrality aim of the European Union. It now covers electricity transmission and storage, offshore grids for renewable energy, hydrogen transmission and storage, electrolysers, smart gas grids, smart electricity grids, and the transport and storage of carbon dioxide. Moreover, projects which apply for PCI or PMI status need to demonstrate that they contribute significantly to sustainability in terms of the integration of renewable energy sources into the grid or the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions[3]. The Commission also continues to work on faster expansion and upgrade of the electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure as a key condition for the integration of a significantly higher share of renewable energy sources.

For example, the Commission and EU Member States are actively promoting offshore renewables as a key pillar to decarbonisation, energy transition, and energy security. Within the TEN-E framework, Member States have cooperated with their neighbours and agreed in January 2023 on ambitious regional targets per sea basin, which amount to 111GW by 2030 and 317GW by 2050 for the whole EU. It is important to underline that addressing the challenges of climate change and enhancing energy security should go hand in hand in European and Member State energy policies. Initiatives and measures, such as REPower EU adopted by the European Union over the last couple of years, aim at strengthening energy security, also by enhancing the objectives of the European Green Deal and Fit for 55.

Conclusion

The Commission agrees with the overall objective of the petition to increase the share of renewable energies, but is of the opinion that the measures by the EU and its Member States on how to increase their renewable energy shares should be taken in line with the principle of subsidiarity. The higher share of renewables translates into the need for new cross-border grid infrastructure, which the Commission recognises as being of high importance to accelerate the energy transition. The Commission is committed to achieving a sustainable, integrated, and secure internal energy market across its Member States. With the revised Regulation on Trans-European Networks for Energy, it supports the development of an internal energy market by facilitating cross-border transmission and distribution infrastructure as well as the expansion of offshore renewables.

[3] See 2022/869 (19).

As mentioned above, certain nuclear energy related activities are recognised under the EU Taxonomy specifically as transitional activities as set out in Article 10(2) of the Taxonomy Regulation[4].

[4] Regulation (EU) 2020/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2020 on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, and amending Regulation (EU) 2019/2088, OJ L 198, 22.6.2020, p. 13–43.