
EU'S ENERGY PROJECT LIST DENOUNCED BY UNIMPRESSED MEPS

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A proposed list of priority energy projects drawn up by the European Commission has come under intense scrutiny by MEPs, some of whom accuse the EU executive of focusing too heavily on fossil fuel projects. The most critical voices plan to launch a landmark objection to the list.

Two months ago, the Commission presented its projects of common interest (PCI) list, which includes energy infrastructure projects like electricity interconnectors and gas pipelines, meant to help the EU meet its energy and climate objectives.

On Tuesday (23 January), MEPs grilled the EU executive about the list, demanding to know how its energy directorate chose what to include and remove from the list. Commission representative Catharina Sikow-Magny was given a rough ride by the European lawmakers.

The main points raised by members of the energy committee (ITRE) included concerns about the number of gas projects on the list, the methodology used by the Commission to compile the list and the level of transparency deployed.

S&D group MEPs Kathleen Van Brempt and Dan Nica both criticised the Commission for not involving the Parliament at an earlier stage. Van Brempt said there had been too little dialogue with ITRE on how the list is compiled.

Romanian lawmaker Nica told Sikow-Magny that her institution should in the future approach the PCI list, which is revised every two years, in a more transparent manner.

The Commission representative replied that she would be willing to come before the committee more often and even suggested that Energy Union boss Maroš Šefčovič could be persuaded to debate with the MEPs.

Coherent maths

Criticism has also been levied at the number of gas projects on the list. While the Commission says the number has decreased since the last outing, in line with EU guidelines, others counter that the number has in fact increased because the executive has grouped projects together.

Sikow-Magny defended the list by pointing out that the first list had 108 gas projects and the current one, the third iteration, has 53. She also insisted that the methodology used in all three lists has been coherent and consistent and that grouping has always been used.

Parliament backs net-zero carbon emissions by 2050

Green lawmakers have hailed a great victory for the climate as a proposal to bring down to zero the amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted in the atmosphere by 2050 received unexpected backing from the European Parliament yesterday (17 January).

Objection on the horizon

But the main critics of the list, including GUE/NGL lawmaker Xabier Benito Ziluaga and Greens/EFA colleague Michèle Rivasi, believe that the Commissions offering is so flawed that they plan to launch an objection within the ITRE committee.

This would force MEPs to vote on the list, rather than just grant it an automatic rubber stamp. It would be the first time that lawmakers have been asked to vote on the PCI list in this way. But under the rules of the game, MEPs will not vote on individual projects but on the list as a whole.

At an event at the European Parliament hosted by Ziluaga and Rivasi on Monday (22 January), activists from across Europe came to Brussels to talk about a number of energy projects that they believe endanger the EU's environmental goals, including the TAP pipeline and a new LNG station on the Irish coast.

ITRE's next meeting at the end of February will likely see committee MEPs vote on the list. If a majority reject it, it will go to a full plenary sitting in March. A qualified majority there would reject the list completely but the chances of that happening are very slim, due to support from the EPP and ECR groups.

ITRE chair Jerzy Buzek (EPP) closed the Tuesday meeting by agreeing that the debate is important but warned that it is impossible to manage with renewables without gas power plants, suggesting the objection will go no further than the committee vote.

Bulgaria's priorities revealed

ITRE lawmakers also welcomed Bulgarian energy minister Temenuzhka Petkova, who outlined her country's priorities in the sector during the six-month rotating presidency.

As expected, she revealed that energy interconnectors, predominantly gas, with the Western Balkans will be a focus, while it will also push for a gas hub in its own region. But as far as the update of the gas directive is concerned, the presidency seems less committed, as it will only target consensus on the matter.

As far as other pending EU legislation is concerned, the presidency is ready to start work on the

renewables, energy efficiency and governance files, which were all finalised by the Parliament in Strasbourg last week. The presidency will also work on the electricity market design directive but a trilogue looks unlikely before the end of its tenure.

Kaynak/Source: