EU energy dependency weakens Europe's 'geopolitical influence'

By Jean-Marc Josset, Philippe Dumas and Xavier Noyon - 24th March 2014

Facing geopolitical turmoil and international competition in sectors of strategic importance, the European economy is being exposed to volatile fossil fuel prices and insecure imports, say Jean-Marc Josset, Philippe Dumas and Xavier Noyon.

Investing in renewables for heating and cooling will bring security of supply and more competitiveness. On top of this, the EU could save up to €11.5bn per year.

The growing uncertainties over the crisis in Ukraine show once again all the limits of Europe's energy dependency. According to Eurostat, about one third of EU's total crude oil and natural gas imports in 2010 originated from Russia.

The EU energy dependency contributes not only to weaken our geopolitical influence on the international arena, but fuelled the dramatic GDP-leakage with the EU having spent €46bn - or 4.2% of its GDP - on importing fossil fuels in 2012 alone.

Port of that fuel in the form of natural gas and heating oil is used for heating our houses, our offices or for industrial purposes. These energies alone account for half the EU's energy needs. In these sectors, however, readily available renewable energy solutions, combined with energy efficiency measures, are a practical and versatile option to alleviate our fossil fuels dependency. This option is obviously much more environmentally constructive and beneficial than developing shale gas in Europe.

Achieving the additional renewable energy consumption in heating and cooling foreseen by member states could allow the EU to reduce its import of natural gas from third countries by the equivalent of 35 million tons of oil equivalent per year from 2020, representing a saving of some €11.5bn per year.

Over recent years, the lack of awareness and political support to renewables for heating and cooling has meant only modest market development in the sector. However, in the framework of the current discussions on EU climate and energy policies beyond 2020, there is a great opportunity to invert this trend.

Decarbonising our energy sector should not be regarded as a burden, but rather as an opportunity for Europe's industrial renaissance. Clear pledges on renewables for heating and cooling and energy efficiency will increase the EU's energy independence, while improving our balance of trade, creating a substantial amount of new local jobs and ensuring stable and affordable energy prices to our consumers and industries.

This is why the European parliament, in its resolution on the 2030 framework on climate and energy policies, has called on the commission and member states to analyse the remaining potential of renewables for heating and cooling and to look into synergies between increased consumption of renewables and the implementation of the energy efficiency directive and the energy performance of buildings directive.

The European renewable energy associations, the European biomass association (AEBION), European geothermal energy council (EGEC) and the European solar thermal industry federation (ESTIF) representing the biomass, geothermal and solar thermal sectors, thus call on all EU policymakers to recognise the major and
constructive role that the renewable heating and cooling sector can play and to give it all the attention it deserves in the ongoing debate on EU economy decarbonisation, climate change effects mitigation and energy dependency reduction.

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