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Debate: “Energy security in the European Union: between green ambitions and securing supply”

- European News in the Spotlight -

online Event (Zoom)

- Event Report -

The European Institute of Romania (EIR), in partnership with the Embassy of Romania in the Czech Republic, organized, on **Friday, October 14, 2022**, between 11:00 and 13:00, a debate concerning the *Energy security in the European Union: between green ambitions and securing supply*. It is the first in a **new online debates series** entitled ***European News in the Spotlight*** with the objective of informing the public about the importance that the Council of the European Union has in coordinating the policies of the Member States in specific areas, bringing into debate topics that are priorities on the agenda of the current Presidency.

The event aimed to discuss the transition towards ensuring affordable, secure and sustainable access to energy sources for the European citizens, by unfolding the *REPowerEU plan* and its subsequent initiatives, while dealing with the crisis enhanced by the multidimensional effects of the illegal and unprovoked military aggression of Russian Federation against Ukraine. The participants were mainly officials, civil servants and experts, from different countries.

The opening session occasioned a welcoming address of Mrs. **Oana-Mihaela Mocanu**, Director General, European Institute of Romania and Her Excellency, Mrs. **Antoaneta Barta**, Ambassador of Romania in the Czech Republic, and an official intervention of Mrs. **Tatiana Iosiper**, Special Representative for Energy and Climate Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Romania. They outlined the framework of the debate, European coordinating efforts and policies, results and perspectives of European cooperation. Ensuring energy security and reducing the energy dependency on Russia is a key priority of the European Union (EU), of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, and of the newly established political community. Worldwide, cooperation, dialogue and alternative solutions reduced the impact of the energy crisis on climate goals. The energy crisis provokes European unity, solidarity and resilience as well as national support for policies developments. It also generated an opportunity, a turning point for cleaner, more affordable and more secure energy systems.

The event's main expert guests were Mrs. **Kateřina Davidová**, Senior research fellow, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, Czech Republic, Mr. **Radu Magdin**, CEO Smartlink Communications, Romania and Mrs. **Eugenia Gușilov**, Director, Romania Energy Center – ROEC, Romania.

Mrs. **Corina Murafa**, affiliate expert, Center for Democracy Studies, Energy & Climate Policy Expert, Romania, ensured the moderation of the debate and also gave substantial comments on the topic.



Mr. **Radu Magdin**, CEO Smartlink Communications, shared his views with regard to strategic communications in times of crisis. Adopting the adequate policy measures is not sufficient in addressing the green ambitions and securing supply, if they are not acceptable to the public. Amongst his assessments, the following stood out:

- ✓ The Czech Presidency did a very good job, in terms of strategic communication.
- ✓ Crisis is an opportunity, with momentum for the decision-making.
- ✓ Under immediate pressure to secure supply it is difficult to give reassuring messages to the citizens, to be constructive in Pan-European communication.
- ✓ Rising prices and inflation are part of the discontent sensed in the dialogues between governments and citizens, governments and businesses, private sectors and citizens.
- ✓ In the current situation, there is a Pan-European agreement in terms of resolve; while we are aiming for resistance, we are trying to be resistant; reliability of solutions is increasingly important.
- ✓ The stakeholders display a current need for speed in dealing with the energy crisis, which entails sacrifice of process and consultation. The measures need public support, but the people also need to be supported by governments.
- ✓ The Europe is heading for a great future, though currently is still negotiable how much we are in a grey land.
- ✓ There is an inconsistency among European leaders in terms of messages and their balance (e.g., length of the crisis, from one to ten winters).
- ✓ Industries play key roles, with initiatives in innovation and investments. Therefore, overly populist policies in terms of pricing (profit bashing) are not acceptable.

Mrs. **Kateřina Davidová**, Senior research fellow, EUROPEUM, differentiated the performance of the Czech government, excellent in the exercise of Presidency, but not so good domestically (rising energy prices, inflation, demonstrations). Her presentation of the EU energy situation and decarbonisation measures revealed some of the trends:

- ✓ In the EU, energy dependency is addressed by increasing the domestic production, including of renewable sources, diversification of imports, reduction of consumption, and increasing the energy efficiency.
- ✓ In 2022, the US is delivering to EU more than the Russian net supply, considerably diminished over the last year. Prices of Russian gas is roughly the same as last year.
- ✓ The industry gas consumption reduced in 2022, compared to the average 2019-2021. EU solar generation has gone up 20%, due to the policy measures and war.
- ✓ EU can stop the imports of Russian gas by 2025. The measures taken, including the ones of Repower EU, increased targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency.



✓ In 2022, the gas consumption of the households declined in EU by 7% over the summer. The target for March 2023—a reduction by 15%—is difficult to achieve, due to the winter.

Mrs. **Eugenia Gușilov**, Director, Romania Energy Center, presented a vivid picture of Romania, with its energy policy measures, their strengths and weaknesses:

✓ In Romania, state owned enterprises—built in the seventies and eighties—dominate the energy sector. They all missed the boom of renewable energy of the second decade, with the exception of Hidroelectrica. Unlike three years ago, enterprises of the centralised power system are now interested in turning to green energy.

✓ Romania does not yet consider some measures of the REPowerEU plan (e.g. installation of 10 million heat pumps by 2025), though it stimulates very well the production of renewable energy.

✓ Regarding renewable energy projects, Romania has set a target of 6.9 Gigawatts of energy capacity by 2030 in its national energy and climate plan. Allocated funds, like those from the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Modernisation Fund, make it possible to double the target. We need to move faster.

✓ In terms of energy production, the EU is insufficiently stressing the need to speed up the EU based natural gas production; Repower EU considers the hydrogen, biomass and other solutions, but not the domestic gas reserves (such as the offshore ones of Romania, Netherlands, and Greece).

✓ There is a new awareness of the importance of nuclear energy to be played in achieving decarbonisation goals. Even coal-fired power generation is gaining momentum again.

✓ The crisis is artificial. We need to remember why all this is happening. The gas is still available. However, due to an illegal and brutal war at our Eastern borders, we are also in a war. EU needs to reprioritise how we use energy and reshuffle its priorities in the midterm.

During a rich and fruitful question and answer session, a new set of ideas emerged, including the following ones:

✓ Communication of unpopular decisions requires politicians to lead by power of example, with enthusiasm, a clear path forward and exit.

✓ Traditionally, energy policy measures targeted major stakeholders, while now there is a need to consider citizens as active actors.

✓ There is a certain resistance of the past to the future. The old business model, based on centralised power generation and distribution, is rejecting the new model, with distributive power generation. Some governments are reluctant to embrace the new model and move towards the future.

✓ All member states enjoy the freedom of choice in taking the right path to meeting the EU climate and energy goals. Temporary measures, related to the urgency of the energy



demand, may disregard these goals. On the long run, even though the energy sources may be changed and diversified, countries will still use oil and gas as energy sources.

Report by

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