

There is a vast potential for green gas in Europe, generated from sustainable resources such as biomass and organic waste, some of which can directly be injected into the grid or take the shape of hydrogen, writes Claude Turmes.

Claude Turmes is a Member of the European Parliament for the Greens/EFA group. He is rapporteur on the proposed regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union, which is currently making its way through the EU institutions.

On 24 November last year, the European Commission put forward their third list of Projects of Common Interests that are meant to better connect various EU Member States and facilitate their energy supply.

However this list is in stark contradiction with the Paris Agreement and with the Union's climate policy. It includes a long list of useless, environmentally-harmful new gas pipelines. That is why a cross-party coalition of MEPs decided to challenge this list and raise a formal objection that will be put to vote tomorrow in the European Parliament's industry and energy committee.

The aim of this objection is to defeat the myth showing gas as a necessary transition fuel to fight climate change, as well as to promote transparency and democracy in the decision-making around energy infrastructure.

Firstly, the European Commission as always overestimated the future of gas consumption in Europe and the PCI list is based on artificially inflated gas demand scenarios. Even the Court of Auditors identified this shortcoming in its 2015 report: "the Commission has persistently overestimated gas demand (...) and needs to restore the credibility of the forecasts it uses".

The coal phase-out does not require more gas consumption. Wind and solar are already the cheapest energy source to invest in and are replacing conventional generation. Of course these variable energy sources need to be balanced and flexible gas turbines can play a role for that, alongside demand-side management, electricity interconnectors and storage. But these flexible gas turbines would only run for a very limited number of hours every year, meaning a small volume of gas. In addition, successful EU policy in the field of energy efficiency triggers a constantly reducing energy demand in our building stock.

Secondly, the PCI selection process is a black box, ending up with a Christmas tree to satisfy the wishes of gas transmission system operators acting as project developers. ENTSO-G cannot any more be judge and party, pretending to promote the general interest but in practice defending individual commercial interests of their TSO members. The European Parliament needs to act as a counterweight to this gas lobby exercise.

Thirdly, the development on new gas infrastructure is based on the wrong assumption that

there are still major security of gas supply concerns in Europe. This assumption was true for a long time, it is not any more. Thanks to targeted investment in reverse-flow cofinanced by the EU budget and to a risk-mitigation strategy anchored in the security of gas supply regulation, the EU has critically reduced its exposure to gas supply disruption.

With the exception of some limited segments missing in South-Eastern Europe and in the Baltic region, we do not need any new gas infrastructure in Europe to ensure energy security.

Finally, a comprehensive life-cycle analysis of fossil fuel gas leaves little room for doubt: fossil fuel gas is not compatible with our climate objective to limit global warming to 1.5 to 2°C. The future of gas can only be green. That would allow the EU to make a smart use of an already existing and well performing gas transmission and distribution infrastructure. There is a vast potential for green gas in Europe, generated from sustainable resources such as biomass and organic waste, either for local consumption or upgraded into biomethane and directly injected into the grid. In addition to being climate compatible, this strategy would generate income notably in rural areas, and enhance benefits of a truly circular economy.

Green gas can also the shape of hydrogen, where electrolysis is coupled to a fully renewable electricity generation unit. Some good examples already exist. Pilot energy islands in the North Sea are being rolled-out, reaping the full potential of electricity/gas sector coupling. French gas TSO and DSO explore the feasibility of a 100% renewable gas mix by 2050, combining anaerobic digestion, pyrogasification and power-to-gas.

EU law-makers have an opportunity tomorrow to speak out in favour of green gas, clean energy and more transparency rather than perpetuating the old fossil Jurassic world.

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