

European Council/Energy

Share gas enters debate on competitiveness

By Marie-Martine Buckens | Wednesday 22 May 2013

Completion of the internal energy market, deployment of major infrastructure and security of supply are the priorities spelled out by the European leaders at their EU summit, on 22 May in Brussels, in addressing the risks to Europe's competitiveness of constantly rising energy prices and costs. That is nothing new, really, and the conclusions adopted by the heads of state and government after discussing energy policy and before tackling taxation at their meeting (see separate article) are strikingly similar to those of recent Energy Councils.

There was one new aspect, though: the question of shale gas officially entered the European debate, with the text endorsing the Commission's initiative to assess "more systematic recourse to indigenous sources of energy". The term "shale gas" is not mentioned, but José Manuel Barroso did not hesitate to use it in his address to the European Parliament on the eve of the Council. That reference makes Philippe Lamberts (Greens-EFA, Belgium) shudder: "The United States has given itself a respite with its cheap shale gas revolution and we're being told that if we don't want to shoot ourselves in the foot then we had better do the same," he told *Europolitics*.

The promotion of renewable energy is nevertheless still among the priorities set out by the 27 leaders, along with the need to review state aid rules to phase out "economically and environmentally harmful" support, "including fossil fuel subsidies". Greenpeace and the European Renewable Energy Council (EREC) are delighted with the Council's renewed commitment to discuss a new energy-climate package for 2030, containing "strong objectives for renewable energy, energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emission reductions". The European Wind Energy Association (EWEA) highlighted President Herman Van Rompuy's introductory statement, in which he expressed concern about the EU's excessive energy dependence (more than 80%). The association noted that Europe has invaluable renewable resources, namely wind energy, a technology in which the EU is a leader.

SOCIAL POLICY SECOND

The European leaders were also expected to voice concerns about the impact of rising energy prices on the most vulnerable consumers. In their initial draft conclusions, they nonetheless insisted that measures in support of these consumers must not "jeopardise the functioning of the internal energy market". This wording was deleted from the conclusions at the last minute at the request of Paris in particular.

The conclusions are available at www.europolitics.info > Search = 335993