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CLIMATE

1.1. EU seeks OK for climate package by mid-2009

7 January 2008, Reuters

EU President Slovenia said on Monday it would use its stewardship of EU business over the next six months to try and steer the bloc's proposed package of energy and climate change reforms towards approval by mid-2009. Prime Minister Janez Jansa told a news conference he would aim by the end of the Slovene presidency on June 30 to have had a first reading in the European Parliament of proposals due to be unveiled later this month intended to spur wider use of renewable energies and include targets for CO2 reductions. "Europe must show that we are serious about climate change," Jansa said of new rules due to be part of a raft of post-2012 proposals covering issues including national emissions targets and clean energy subsidies. The European Union says it is a leader on climate change and is alone in pushing for tough, unilateral emissions-cutting targets, saying it will cut greenhouse gases by a fifth by 2020 versus 1990 levels. (Reporting by William Schomberg; editing by Mark John)

Link: <http://www.reuters.com/article/environmentNews/idUSL0772184020080107>

1.2. WMO to seek satellites to monitor climate change

11 January 2008, By Stephanie Nebehay, Reuters, UK

GENEVA (Reuters) - The United Nations' weather agency will ask NASA and other space agencies next week to make their next generation of satellites available to monitor climate change, a senior official at the U.N. body said on Friday.

The aim is to ensure that satellites launched over the next 20 years constantly record parameters such as sea levels and greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said.

"The main focus of the meeting next week will be the expansion of the global observing system by satellites to not only monitor severe weather, which is a core function, but also to monitor climate on a very continuous and long-term basis," WMO expert Jerome Lafeuille told a news briefing in Geneva.

Senior officials from NASA, the European Space Agency, and space agencies in Japan, China, Brazil and India are due to attend the WMO meeting in New Orleans from Jan 15-16.

Satellites are an essential part of efforts to track severe weather and climate change by providing a global picture of shifts in the climate system, rising ocean levels, impacts on land and in the atmosphere, says the WMO.

Scientists blame climate change mainly on human emissions of greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels and warn it will bring extreme weather including more heatwaves, droughts, floods and rising seas.

At least 16 geostationary and low-earth orbit satellites currently provide operational data on the planet's climate and weather as part of WMO's global observation system.

There are also numerous experimental satellites designed for scientific missions or instrument technology demonstration -- measuring variables such as wind, precipitation and temperature -whose data WMO wants to ensure is captured long-term. "We know there are gaps. Climate monitoring needs very long-term continuity of measurement," Lafeuille, who heads the space-based observing system division of WMO's space program, told Reuters.

"When you look at satellites programmed over the next two decades there are a number of extremely useful satellites but there is no guarantee of continuity of key measurements."

High on WMO's agenda will be ensuring constant monitoring of sea levels for several decades, said the French expert.

Measuring the chemical make-up of the atmosphere -- including greenhouse gases such as CO2 as well as aerosols -- is also key, Lafeuille said.

A record number of 17 satellites are planned for launch in 2008 by countries from China to India and Russia, he said. "Our challenge at WMO is to make sure programs are complementary and that all together we build an optimized system."

Link: <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/L11748114.htm>

1.3. EU Poised to Announce Controversial Climate Package

12 January 2008, Deutsche Welle

The European Commission will unveil a controversial climate package this month which will set greenhouse gas reduction and renewable energy targets for the coming years.

The German press agency dpa is reporting that the latest draft text states that member states will be asked to cut the EU's overall greenhouse gas emissions by "at least 20 per cent" compared to 1990 levels by 2020.

Environmentalists have already attacked targets of this magnitude, which were agreed by EU leaders meeting last March, as being too lenient.

Member states' individual target levels are still under discussion. But richer countries will be asked to contribute more than poorer countries, according to the draft text.

"Member state reduction efforts should be based on the principle of solidarity between member states and the need for sustainable economic growth across the community, taking into account the relative per capita GDP of member states," it states.

Targets modified according to income

power plant with smoke and steam rising from chimneys
Bildunterschrift: Großansicht des Bildes mit der Bildunterschrift: Carbon trading will be allowed under the draft scheme

Countries with a relatively low per capita gross domestic product and whose economies are expected to grow would actually be permitted to increase their greenhouse emissions compared to 2005. This is the last year for which the latest available verified emission data is available.

More prosperous EU countries would, however, be forced to cut their emissions. To ensure fairness, the text further states that "no country should be required to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 to more than 20 per cent below 2005 levels."

But equally the package states that, "no country should be allowed to increase its greenhouse gas emissions in 2020 to more than 25 per cent above 2005 levels." However, an explanatory memorandum to the text puts this figure at 20 per cent instead.

Under the plans, countries would be allowed to buy emission credits from abroad to help meet their targets, or sell their unused quotas.

The package, which still requires approval by the European Parliament and member states, also stipulates that renewable energy sources must make up a 20-per-cent share of energy consumption and that biofuels should account for at least 10-per-cent of transport fuel by 2020.

Link: <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,3053796,00.html>

ENERGY

2.1. EU wants German, French power plan by end of month

7 January 2008, Reuters

France and Germany should come up with their alternative for injecting more competition into Europe's power markets by the end of this month, the European Union's new presidency said on Monday. Paris and Berlin object to a proposal made last September by the European Commission that would require utilities -- such as Electricite de France and Germany's E.ON -- to split their generating and distribution activities.

The Commission proposed two alternatives. Its preference is to require one owner for generation and a separate one for distribution activities. But, taking into account the views of Germany and France, it also proposed separate management of generation and distribution facilities while leaving ownership intact. Andrej Vizjak, the economy minister of rotating EU president Slovenia, told reporters his country was in favour of the Commission's plans but it was also working with France, Germany and other smaller countries which are opposed to them.

"We don't want that someone can, through this seeking another proposal, just delay the whole story," Vizjak told a group of Brussels-based reporters.

"We want to be very effective and at the end of January 2008 we want to have this concrete proposal on the table and find out if it is acceptable, if it is really effective unbundling."

Vizjak said any new proposal would have to get support from those EU countries which are in favour of the Commission's plan.

That proposal would require generators and suppliers of power and gas to sell their transmission infrastructure or hand over control to an independent operator.

Germany, France and others say the changes would weaken European companies. But the commission says they are needed to help EU consumers already hit by soaring energy prices.

(Reporting by William Schomberg)

Link: <http://www.reuters.com/article/rbssIndustryMaterialsUtilitiesNews/idUSL0729808620080107>

2.2. Turkey's role in European energy security

7 January EurActiv.com, Katinka Barysch, Centre for European Reform (CER)

Turkey and the EU should develop a strategic energy cooperation plan, not just for pipelines but also for renewables, energy efficiency and market liberalisation, according to Katinka Barysch of the Centre for European Reform.

Insisting that the EU must unblock accession talks with Ankara in the energy area if it is serious about diversifying

its supply, the December 2007 paper claims that Turkey can make a "substantial contribution" to Europe's energy security.

Barysch argues that as the EU frets over its dependence on Russia, "Turkey's development as a European energy hub looks natural", with vast oil and gas reserves lying in the countries to its east and one of the world's biggest energy markets to its west.

Energy policy cooperation would give Europe a "reliable alternative supply route" and offer Turkey "the opportunity to prove that it is an indispensable partner" for the EU, Barysch argues.

She believes that better connections with both supplier countries and energy consumers would increase Turkey's geopolitical standing and generate "lucrative business" such as transit fees as well as new refineries, terminals and trading facilities.

The Bosphorus strait and its key location for pipeline development at a time when the EU is seeking to find new suppliers and routes for oil and gas help Turkey's bid to become a major European energy hub, Barysch argues.

However, the fulfilment of this potential depends on a "mind-bogglingly complicated array of factors", she warns, citing the Nabucco pipeline as an important "test case" for both EU and Turkish energy policy and an opportunity to prove that "cooperation and integration are good for both sides".

Barysch warns that concerns remain over the security of the Nabucco pipeline's supply and believes that its gas will come from Azerbaijan, possibly Turkmenistan, and eventually Iran and Iraq. Moreover, she describes Russia's support for a number of alternative projects as it attempts to prevent Nabucco being built.

The EU's desire for Turkey to join the Energy Community Treaty (ECT) remains a contentious issue, warns Barysch, as Ankara fears that joining the ECT "suits countries that are not eligible for EU membership" and would thus impact negatively upon the accession process.

Barysch concludes by calling for the EU to press Turkey to improve the investment climate in the energy sector and include Ankara in the development of its energy strategy regarding foreign policy, renewables and diversification.

Meanwhile, Turkey should outline how its energy market liberalisation, climate change, energy efficiency and renewables policies complement those of the EU, she adds.

Link: <http://www.euractiv.com/en/energy/turkey-role-european-energy-security/article-169387>

2.3. New nuclear plants get go-ahead

10 January 2008, UK, BBC news

A new generation of nuclear power stations in the UK has been given formal backing by the government.

Business Secretary John Hutton told MPs they would give a "safe and affordable" way of securing the UK's future energy supplies while fighting climate change.

He said any plants would be built at or near existing reactors by private firms and said he hoped the first one would be completed "well before 2020".

Critics say new reactors will be expensive, dirty and dangerous.

The government will not be building any reactors itself - but it says it will take steps, such as streamlining the planning process and identifying likely sites, to encourage private operators to build them.

Mr Hutton conceded that no nuclear plant had been built anywhere in the world without public money - but he insisted there would be no subsidies from the UK government.

"It is a matter for the power companies to bring forward proposals on the basis that there will be no public subsidies," he told BBC Radio 4's The World at One.

Public funds would only be provided in the "very unlikely circumstances of an emergency at a nuclear plant," added Mr Hutton.

According to its white paper, the government will not offer extra incentives to invest in nuclear power, but some tax advantages may be available to firms hit by decommissioning costs to ensure a "level fiscal playing field" with other forms of electricity generation.

The government has also yet to decide how much new nuclear operators should pay towards the cost of building underground caverns as a permanent storage site for Britain's nuclear waste.

Until a suitable site can be found, waste will continue to be stockpiled above ground at "interim" facilities at Sellafield, in Cumbria, it has said.

Mr Hutton rejected calls to find a permanent storage site before giving the green light to new nuclear plants.

'Tried and tested'

French energy giant EDF has already said it plans to build four nuclear plants in the UK by 2017, without subsidies, following the government's announcement.

Chief executive Vincent De Rivaz said: "We have made it clear that once the right frameworks are in place, we will be in a position to move fast, move first and move safe."

German power company E.On and British Gas parent Centrica also expressed interest in building nuclear plants in the UK, following the government's announcement.

Speaking earlier in the Commons, Mr Hutton said the government had concluded nuclear power was a "tried and tested", and safe, technology which had a role to play "in this country's future energy mix alongside other low-carbon sources".

Analysis of future gas and carbon prices showed nuclear was "affordable and provides one of the cheapest electricity options available to reduce our carbon emissions".

Waste storage

An independent body, the Nuclear Liabilities Financing Assurances Board, will look at the potential clean-up costs - including any impact on electricity bills - and a review of potential sites for new reactors will report next year.

Mr Hutton assured MPs that private operators would be expected to meet the full cost of building nuclear plants, decommissioning and disposing of waste.

But he said no "artificial cap" would be put on the proportion of electricity to be generated from nuclear power or any other source of "low carbon energy". Existing nuclear power stations produce about 20% of the UK's electricity.

Conservative spokesman Alan Duncan welcomed the government's commitment to nuclear power.

But he warned: "On no account should there be any kind of subsidy for nuclear power."

Steve Webb, for the Liberal Democrats, attacked the decision, warning the country faced being locked into a technology "for the best part of a century, when other technologies like carbon capture and storage, like renewables, are evolving practically every day".

He added: "I can't decide whether new nuclear is a white elephant or a red herring. But very clearly what it isn't is the answer to the energy problems we face today."

Legal challenge

Ministers say a decision on nuclear power is necessary now, as many nuclear and coal-fired power stations are due to close within 20 years.

The nuclear industry believes it can get the first new plant on-stream by 2017.

The government is also publishing an Energy Bill designed to reduce carbon emissions and secure the UK's power supplies.

But its nuclear plans could still be subject to a legal challenge from Greenpeace, which successfully challenged an earlier government review backing nuclear power in the High Court.

It claims research shows that even 10 new reactors would cut the UK's carbon emissions by only about 4% some time after 2025.

Greenpeace executive director John Sauven said: "This is bad news for Britain's energy security and bad news for our efforts to beat climate change."

Although energy policy is not devolved, Scottish ministers have control of the planning system and also have to give consent under the Electricity Act to the construction of new power stations above a certain size.

Scotland's First Minister Alex Salmond has said there is "no chance" of more nuclear power stations being built in Scotland.

But Mr Hutton he believed the Scottish government was making a "mistake" by ruling out nuclear and it was "entirely possible" that Scottish consumers would rely on electricity generated in England in the future.

Link: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7179579.stm

ENERGY POLICY

3.1. Lack of clear EU energy policies threatens surge in power prices

11 January 2008, By Brendan Keenan, independent.ie

Disjointed policies will see the European Union fail to meet its objectives in both energy security and emissions of greenhouse gases, according to this week's report on global risks from the World Economic forum.

"At present, the EU seems to be drifting into high dependence on gas from a single source (Russia), high investment in renewable energy technologies which may not offer the scale necessary to achieve ambitious targets of reductions in carbon emissions, and a highly-differentiated approach to nuclear power," the report says.

The forum is made up of a team of leading business people and academics.

They added: "Should the current situation continue, it is inevitable that the EU will be vulnerable to future energy shortages and will fail to meet its stated goals for reductions in carbon emissions."

The position in the US is different, but no better.

"High investment in bio-fuel production may bring its own risks, while dependence on foreign energy supplies continues." One problem is that the power industry in both places is delaying investment in new capacity because of uncertainty over future regulations to reduce greenhouse gases.

