Energy Security: A non-binding way to the future?

Years spent negotiating for energy security, environmental protection and sustainability in European Union and still the future seems uncertain.

By Alexandros Pantelakis

It's the latest headlines that make us feel that not much progress has happened in the EU in order to ensure a sustainable future for the generations to come. More specifically, a lot of buzz[1] was created the last few days due to the further decisions on energy efficiency targets. A new agreement between lawmakers and ministers is willing to cut energy waste 32.5% by 2030 and reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports. After six rounds of talks and the resignation of a MEP and a high level of compromise, new laws on energy efficiency for the next decade were settled. At inter-institutional talks about the energy issues, MEPs had insisted that a binding target wasn't something that they desire. Consequently, this agreement moves on the same ground with the previous ones, it's actually a non-binding decision which keeps the doors open for the same old practices.

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[1] Morgan, S. (2018, June 20). *EU decides on non-binding 2030 energy efficiency target*. Climate Change News Retrieved from http://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/06/20/eu-decides-non-binding-2030-energy-efficiency-target/

To be fair, a lot of things has changed during the last years. The Single European Act back in the 1980s was a landmark in terms of establishing a strategy for the European Union developing competitive integrated markets, common infrastructure and transnational beneficial agreements becoming the guard of the Energy Security[2].

Also, in this direction back in 1997, the *Kyoto Protocol* was concluded and established legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in the period 2008–2012. Actually, it was the first agreement between nations to set country-by-country reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions[3]. Unfortunately, due to the big delay in becoming international law, valuable time was spent and instead of achieving the goals of the agreement, the damage from countries such as China and the United States surpassed any good outcome.

Lately, we witnessed the launch of *Energy Union Strategy* in 2015, which was a major break-through and a way to "make energy more secure, affordable and sustainable" as we read in the official statement. Energy Union Strategy will promote the free stream of energy across borders and a secure supply in every EU country. It supports that with the aid of technologies and the renewed infrastructures, it will contribute in reducing household bills and generating new jobs and skills, as corporations expand shipping and encourage growth. It will lead to a sustainable, low carbon and environmentally friendly economy, putting Europe at the forefront of renewable energy production, clean energy technologies, and the battle against global warming[4]. The Energy Union strategy builds further on the 2030

[2] Proedrou, F. (2017). *A new framework for EU energy security: putting sustainability first.* European Politics and Society, 18(2), 182.

[3] Unknown (2011, March 11). *What is the Kyoto protocol and has it made any difference?* The Guardian. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/mar/11/kyoto-protocol

[4] European Commission (2015). *Building the Energy Union*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-strategy-and-energy-union/building-energy-union

Framework for Climate and Energy and the European Energy Security Strategy.

If we pay attention to the words of the statement, we clearly notice that the environmental protection is missing from the basic goals. Continuing the reading process of the plan we stopped at the phrase "environmentally friendly economy", which clearly indicates the prism under they see environment, in terms of market. Besides, when it comes to first-order energy goals, environment is being always underestimated[5]. The Ukraine crisis made it clear that energy needs were playing the most crucial role when Russian relations with the European Union were at risk. This example proves the above claim that environmental long-term goals usually are being forgotten when an energy crisis takes place[6]. Energy Union has no specific order of priorities which means that such topics are open to be discussed again in the future[7]. Supply security and the competitiveness concerns that became apparent in the eurozone made it difficult for the decision makers to pay attention at the environmental problems. The cheap energy combined[8] with an extensive use of coal worked in the opposite way. Consequently, the above goals need the participation of member-states, of corporations and of institutions. Central and eastern EU countries have a long way in order to be ready for a green transition. For example, Poland's ample coal reserves make it difficult to do such a major swift. Due to these reasons many countries have been locked in an internal marketing game which makes it impossible to change it easily[9].

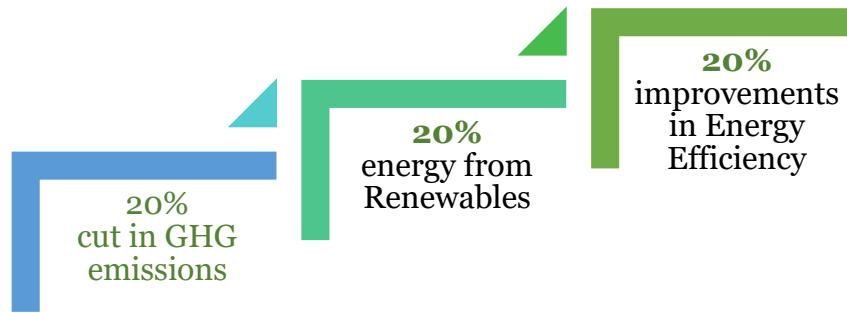[5] Held & Hervey, 2011 as mentioned in Proedrou, F. 2017: 183
[6] Proedrou, F. (2017). A new framework for EU energy security: putting sustainability first. European Politics and Society, 18(2), 183.
[7] Siddi, 2016, p.141 as mentioned in Proedrou, F, 2017:186
[8] Ibid, p.188
[9] Ibid, p.186

In the meantime, European Union in 2007 introduced the *2020 Climate and Energy Package*[10] with specific and binding goals regarding three major pillars: greenhouse gas emissions, energy from renewables and improvements in Energy Efficiency (*figure 1*). The 20-20-20 initiative was a very good starting point for the EU in protecting the environment.

20%
improvements
in Energy
Efficiency

20%
energy from
Renewables

20%
cut in GHG
emissions

Figure 1

Two years before the crucial date, we can say confidently that the above agreement met with success. The European Union is on course to reach its 2020 climate and energy targets[11]. Official data for 2015 confirm that greenhouse gas emissions have already decreased beyond the 20% reduction target. The use of energy from renewable sources is firmly growing and getting closer to the 20% target and energy consumption levels are currently considered on track, but they are increasing insignificantly, which means that Member States have to make greater efforts to keep the EU on track in terms of its energy efficiency target. At the same time, energy consumption increased for two years in a row, triggered by higher heat demand by households because of the colder winter conditions in Europe. Also, there was an increased activity in the transport sector. Different factors can easily
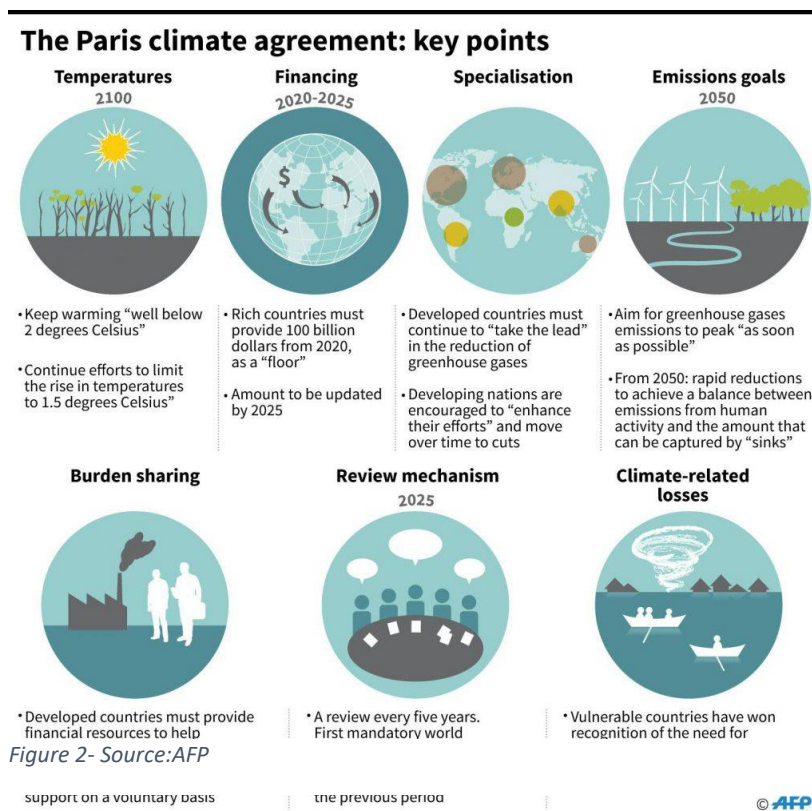
[10] EU Commission. (2008). *Package of Implementation Measures for the EU's Objectives on Climate Change and Renewable Energy for 2020*. Commission Staff Working Document.
[11] European Environment Agency (2017). *Progress of the European Union and its Member States towards 2020 climate and energy targets*. Executive Summary. Retrieved from https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/climate/trends-and-projections-in-europe/trends-and-projections-in-europe-2017/executive-summary

cause problems in the agreement and EU must be alert about them.

Another crucial factor concerns the member state themselves. EU may as a whole achieve the 20-20-20 goals but the progress that each state presents is very important. For example, Malta and Ireland are member-states that until today couldn't comply with the EU target policy and the gap to 2020 ESD target is -11,5% and -17% respectively[12].

Regarding the climate change, bigger efforts are needed. Vibes of good intention came from the Paris Agreement in 2015 where for the first time nations from all over the world – not just the EU – sat on the discussion table to elaborate on the repercussions of their harmful actions and the ways in which they can avoid further damage. The main agreement includes measures for the greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance (figure 2).

The Paris climate agreement: key points

Temperatures
2100

• Keep warming "well below 2 degrees Celsius"

• Continue efforts to limit the rise in temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius"

Financing
2020-2025

• Rich countries must provide 100 billion dollars from 2020, as a "floor"

• Amount to be updated by 2025

Specialisation

• Developed countries must continue to "take the lead" in the reduction of greenhouse gases

• Developing nations are encouraged to "enhance their efforts" and move over time to cuts

Emissions goals
2050

• Aim for greenhouse gases emissions to peak "as soon as possible"

• From 2050: rapid reductions to achieve a balance between emissions from human activity and the amount that can be captured by "sinks"

Burden sharing

• Developed countries must provide financial resources to help support on a voluntary basis

Review mechanism
2025

• A review every five years. First mandatory world the previous period

Climate-related losses

• Vulnerable countries have won recognition of the need for

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Figure 2- Source:AFP

[12] European Environment Agency (2017). Trends and projections in Europe 2017, Tracking progress towards Europe's climate and energy targets. EEA Report, p.21. Retrieved from https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/trends-and-projections-in-europe-2017

Unfortunately, this agreement once again accepted a lot of criticism[13] regarding the non-binding spirit that it has. Its key points are more like promises rather than commitments.

European Commission in January of 2018 suggested some changes in the adopted amendments[14] of the use of renewables in which the 55th amendment before the change stated clearly that "in the absence of binding national targets post-2020, the remaining national incentives may not be sufficient to reach the long-term decarbonisation goals for 2030 and 2050". Now, this text was removed, hence the non-binding demand that was expressed by the MEPs and affected the latest agreement on energy security. Some scholars support the view[15] which states that the magnitude of the environmental damage is so big that even if the European goals of 2020 and 2030 are achieved, the problem won't be solved. Despite a number of actions intended to energy efficiency and savings, the progress made in this area has been particularly[16] disappointing and the Commission has received severe criticism.

[13] Milman, Oliver (12 December 2015). "*James Hansen, father of climate change awareness, calls Paris talks 'a fraud'*". The Guardian. London, England. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/12/james-hansen-climate-change-paris-talks-fraud

[14] European Parliament (2018). Amendments adopted by the European Parliament on 17 January 2018 on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources. Retrieved from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2018-0009+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN

[15] Proedrou, F. (2017). *A new framework for EU energy security: putting sustainability first*. European Politics and Society, 18(2), 183.

[16] Adelle, C., Pallemaerts, M., & Chiavari, J. (2009). *Climate change and energy security in Europe: Policy integration and its limits*. Stockholm Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, p.51

Energy security reconsidered

Energy security is one of the most important regulators of the quality of the future life. As economist E.F. Schumacher stated[17], energy is "not just another commodity, but the precondition of all commodities, a basic factor equal with air, water, and earth". When we start elaborating on the energy security we should have in mind these major three dimensions: Security of supplies, affordable prices and environmental protection and sustainability[18]. Energy security means that there are available sources that cover the energy needs without putting in risk the environment. Some scholars add also a fourth pillar, regulation and governance which underline the values of "transparency, accountability, legitimacy, integrity, stability, resource curse, geopolitics, free trade, competition, profitability, interconnectedness, security of demand, exports"[19]. The security of supplies, the affordability of prices, the sustainability, the impact on geopolitical changes and on development, are among some factors that energy security plays a massive role. Energy security is essential for our society, yet its pervasiveness makes it inclined to market breakdowns and under-distribution[20].

Nowadays, our energy needs are based mostly on fossil fuels which are non-renewable and exhaustible[21]. The EU energy strategy finds difficult to guarantee energy security for the Union principally due to its dependence on fossil

[17] Schumacher EF, Kirk G (1977). *Schumacher on energy: speeches and writings of E.F. Schumacher*. London: Cape. p.2.
[18] Proedrou, F. (2015). *Rethinking energy security: An inter-paradigmatic debate*. Policy Paper. p.7.
[19] Sovacool, B. K., & Mukherjee, I. (2011). *Conceptualizing and measuring energy security: A synthesized approach*. Energy, 36(8), p.5345
[20] Same, p.5343
[21] Proedrou, F. (2015). *Rethinking energy security: An inter-paradigmatic debate*. Policy Paper. p.8.

energy imports[22]. New ways of expanding them are always being discovered, but it doesn't mean that these kinds of fuels will last forever. Unfortunately, shale oil, gas and tar sands come as equal alternatives with much more disastrous effects on the environment. Setting no limits in the consumption of the energy means that no limit is set in the environmental disaster. But what will happen if the energy sources aren't enough to cover our energy needs? There will be higher prices due to the tightening of global markets.

Most important, Europe imports almost all of its energy needs from abroad[23]. The energy dependence of the EU is increasing continually and so is the domestic demand and the industrial needs. At the same time, domestic production is decreasing, with estimates of about 80%–90% dependency by 2030. Less dependency in energy from countries such as Turkey and Russia, means greater confidence for the EU and its powers.

In need of new practices

What we can easily assume is that the current energy regime is unsustainable. So, new practices including different sources of energy and buying from different exporters is the prevailing plan because that way the possibilities of energy deficit are plummeting, and one country won't be dependent on another country which may be a rival or has an unstable political regime. Therefore, geopolitical factor is playing a huge role in energy security. While energy scarcity becomes concrete, potential for conflict also becomes a real threat[24]. And even if it doesn't consist the main reason

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[22] Proedrou, F. (2017). *A new framework for EU energy security: putting sustainability first*. European Politics and Society, 18(2), 182.
[23] Müftüler-Baç, M., & Başkan, D. (2011). *The future of energy security for Europe: Turkey's role as an energy corridor*. Middle Eastern Studies, 47(2), p.363.
[24] Proedrou, F. (2015). *Rethinking energy security: An inter-paradigmatic debate*. Policy Paper. p.9.

for conflict we can say that energy is very politicized and securitized.

West consumes the biggest amount of energy. Reducing their energy demands mean that they can set free resources for the least developed countries. Consequently, the West may become less rich but more prosperous. Simultaneously, security of supplies will be assured because of the less need of supplies worldwide.

Renewable energy can be more competitive in local based because it gives the opportunity to individuals to be a member of the market and make profit by using eco-friendly equipment. Localized energy systems and reduced energy consumption can help the whole energy market maintain the prices to a stable level and actually be sustainable. Prioritizing sustainability can support the security of supply which will be combined with a vital change of the EU's energy systems and an ecological tax reform with high energy prices for the protection of the union's economy[25]. Undoubtfully, non-binding terms cannot persuade the corporations to change their pace and become greener[26].

The technological factor can play a very important role in energy security but until now it doesn't work for the benefit of nature. Using technology in order to maintain this detrimental system of distribution based on fossil fuels doesn't solve any problem but it perpetuates this inconvenient situation. The need of seeing technology from a different scope is imperative.

Additionally, the change of the individual's behavior is vital. It's true that "our behavior is premised upon our normative and ideological background and our fixation on

[25] Proedrou, F. (2017). *A new framework for EU energy security: putting sustainability first*. European Politics and Society, 18(2), 184.
[26] Ibid, p.188.

growth"[27] and the notion that more is better. The repercussion of growth was the urbanization and the distance between humans and nature that this norm has brought. Speaking of growth, we may say that it refers only to economic improvement while development refers also to human and social capital[28]. The latter indicates mostly the quality. Following this thought we come to believe that the countries that are able to make use of the most resources are the ones to develop further than others and will be in the position to enhance their well-being and conceivably also dominate others. Energy issues, therefore, are critically "economized" and "securitized". The keyword here is the prosperity which put the emphasis in the quality and not in quantity. We produce energy to live better now and in the future.

Regarding the State, an ecological tax reform rewarding people who respects the environment with tax breaks can give a new dimension in the protection of energy supplies and the environment.

In terms of geopolitics a new energy perception would weaken the dictatorial regimes in middle east and north Africa and help the democratization process because the dependence of their supplies will be lower and lower.

What you see isn't what you get

A better stability and a more effective energy security strategy can be feasible only if we see the ecological aspect of the energy security problems of the EU, reconsider the priorities of EU energy security, and discover new applications in terms of management and alternative

[27] Proedrou, F. (2015). *Rethinking energy security: An inter-paradigmatic debate*. Policy Paper. p.11.
[28] Ibid, p.5.

energy use[29] which will help us and the future generations. Old practices and established modes of policy-making were not found very helpful, although they involved energy and climate strategy terms. The new era will have to support the free stream of energy across borders and a secure supply in every country of the European Union, With the help of technologies and the renewed infrastructures, it can contribute in reducing household bills and generating new jobs in a local base, as corporations expand shipping and encourage growth. It will certainly create a sustainable, low carbon and environmentally friendly economy with Europe achieving its goals of renewable energy production, clean energy technologies, and the battle against global warming.

Sovacool states[30] that "energy reserves and stockpiles, fuel mixes and diversification, price stability and affordability, justice and equity, technology development, energy efficiency, resilience, investment, environmental quality, governance, and regulation all influence and thus form part of the contemporary national energy security issues". This formation can be used for the planet's advantage and can be done only with binding strategies which includes European Union and other countries. Let's not forget that EU is only responsible for the 9% of the world pollution which means that cooperation with other countries such as China and USA is mandatory.

[29] Proedrou, F. (2017). *A new framework for EU energy security: putting sustainability first*. European Politics and Society, 18(2), 187.
[30] Sovacool, B. K., & Mukherjee, I. (2011). *Conceptualizing and measuring energy security: A synthesized approach*. Energy, 36(8), p.5353

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