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Page 1 of 2

Common EU Energy Strategy 'Will Respect Choices Of Individual States'

8 Mar (NucNet): EU leaders today announced six specific priority areas that could form the basis of a European energy policy, while "respecting the right of member states to make their own energy choices".

The proposals were part of a new green paper (discussion document) – *Secure, Competitive and Sustainable Energy for Europe* – unveiled at a press conference in Brussels, Belgium, chaired by Jose Manuel Barosso, the president of the European Commission, and energy commissioner Andris Piebalgs.

A more sustainable, efficient and diverse energy mix is identified as one of the priority areas. A summary of the proposals said: "The choice of a member state's energy mix is and will remain a question of subsidiarity; however, choices made by one member state inevitably have an impact on the energy security of its neighbours (and of the EU) as a whole."

A proposed regular strategic EU energy review would cover all aspects of energy policy, "analysing all the advantages and drawbacks of different sources of energy, from renewable to coal and nuclear... "This in turn may eventually lead to objectives being established at (EU) level regarding the EU's overall energy mix to ensure security of supply, whilst respecting the right of member state to make their own energy choices."

Other priority areas outlined in the green paper include proposals for:

- A European energy grid code, priority European interconnection plan and a European energy regulator;
- The establishment of a European energy supply observatory and a revision of the existing legislation on oil and gas stocks to ensure they can deal with potential supply disruptions;
- A possible 'action plan' comprising measures for the EU to save 20% of the energy that it would otherwise consume by 2020. In addition, a proposed "roadmap for renewable energy sources" with possible targets to 2020 and beyond to provide a "stable investment climate to generate more competitive renewable energy in Europe";
- A proposed strategic energy technology plan "to ensure European industries are world leaders in this new generation of technologies and processes";
- A common external energy policy allowing Europe to speak with one voice in the international arena "to react to the challenges of growing demand, high and volatile energy prices, increasing import dependence and climate change". A strategic energy review would identify, among other things, "a renewed approach with regard to Europe's partners, including Russia, the EU's most important energy supplier, reflecting our inter-dependence and finally propose a new (EU) mechanism to enable rapid and coordinated reactions to emergency external energy supply situations".

The EU estimates that in Europe alone, around one trillion euros will be needed over the next 20 years to meet expected energy demand and to replace ageing infrastructure. Meanwhile imported energy will be needed to meet about 70% of the EU's energy requirements in the next 20 to 30 years (compared to 50% today) unless domestic energy is made more competitive. The EU points out that this will include reliance on "some regions threatened by insecurity".

About half of the EU's gas consumption comes from just three countries (Russia, Norway and Algeria) and on current trends, gas imports would increase to 80% over the next 25 years. The EU estimates that global demand for energy – together with CO2 emissions – is expected to rise by some 60% by 2030. Global oil consumption has increased by 20% since 1994 and global oil demand is projected to grow by 1.6% per year.

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Dr Peter Haug, director-general of Foratom, the Brussels-based trade association representing the European nuclear industry, said the green paper was a step in the right direction but did not go far enough.

He said: "This strategic document acknowledges that all energy sources can contribute to ensuring sufficient generation capacity to meet demand, and this is a welcome development. We also welcome the green paper's statement that nuclear energy 'represents at present the EU's largest source of largely carbon-free energy in Europe'. However, to fairly reflect the unique contribution that nuclear energy makes to meeting the EU's energy objectives, the green paper should have referred more directly to the central role that it plays in the debate about Europe's future energy needs.

"For example, nuclear energy provides – in countries like France, Germany or Sweden – more than 50% of the base-load generation of electricity."

Dr Haug added: "When the lights go on in Europe, half of them are nuclear-powered. Some countries like the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK are already openly questioning the validity of their nuclear phase-out policies. Others, like Bulgaria, Finland, France and Romania are expanding their nuclear sector. Poland has decided to go nuclear for the first time. Consequently, the nuclear industry will play a proactive role in the debate about the EU's energy future.

"We are confident that during the forthcoming Finnish presidency of the EU, when the energy white paper is due to be published, the nuclear option will rise to the top of the debating agenda – where it really belongs."

Plans for the introduction of a common EU energy policy were announced by European energy commissioner Andris Piebalgs on 4 January 2006, who said: "Nuclear energy also has a role to play in those countries which choose to keep this option open..."

Mr Piebalgs' announcement came as the EU welcomed an agreement for the resumption of gas supplies from Russia to Ukraine following a dispute which led to the suspension of Russian gas deliveries on 1 January 2006 and reductions in deliveries to some EU member states. He said then: "It is clear that Europe needs a clearer and more collective and cohesive policy on security of energy supply. To date, the issue of security of energy supply is only really considered at national member state level, but in reality we need a much greater European-wide approach on this issue."

Further details about the proposals in several languages, including a link to the green paper, are available on the European Commission's website (http://europa.eu.int/press_room/index_en.htm).

Contact the editor on this report john.shepherd@worldnuclear.org

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