

Question Time: How to ensure energy security in the EU in 2023

The 2022 energy crisis following Russia's aggression against Ukraine brought about challenges relating to energy security and affordability in the EU. Thanks to several measures taken last year, energy shortages have so far been avoided. However, the EU must now prepare for next winter, when it might be more difficult to ensure sufficient gas storage. Members of the European Parliament will have the possibility to question the European Commission on this topic at 'question time' during the March I plenary session.

Background

In 2021, Russia was the EU's largest energy supplier, accounting for 45 % of its coal, 36 % of its gas and 25 % of its oil [imports](#). This situation [changed](#) dramatically in 2022. In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU imposed total sanctions on [coal](#) imports (complete embargo since August 2022) and partial ones on [oil](#) imports (embargo on seaborne oil since 5 December 2022 and refined oil products since 5 February 2023). While there has been no embargo on gas, supplies have been limited because of reduced transmission volumes and the subsequent indefinite closure of both Nord Stream pipelines. The EU is currently still [importing](#) gas via the Turk Stream and Druzbapipelines, as well as LNG (liquefied natural gas) from Russia. The latest available [data](#) show that in the third quarter of 2022, the EU imported only 13 % of its coal, 18 % of its gas and 14 % of its oil from Russia.

Significant progress has thus been achieved in improving the EU's energy security while reducing its reliance on Russian fossil fuels. The EU has made concerted [efforts](#) to diversify its energy supplies, fill up gas storage facilities, reduce energy demand, increase energy efficiency and boost the deployment of renewables. [State aid](#) rules have also been loosened to help mitigate the negative effects of high energy prices on businesses, while the Member States have taken [measures](#) to support consumers. Some countries have decided to revive their coal mines temporarily, while others opted to postpone the phase-out of nuclear power plants or to open new ones.

As all 27 Member States are net energy importers, the EU remains dependent on outside suppliers for its energy security. In 2022, the EU managed to cope without supply disruptions; nevertheless, a recent IEA (International Energy Agency) [report](#) estimates that the EU may face a shortage of almost 30 billion cubic metres of natural gas next winter in a potential scenario of a further drop in Russian supplies, LNG demand rebound in China and stern weather. Thus, the EU must now redouble its efforts, building on the progress made so far, as it moves from short-term crisis management to tackling the challenge of ensuring long-term energy security in 2023 and beyond.

EU action

In 2022, the EU took various measures to mitigate the energy crisis. These included adopting several new regulations, proposing revisions to existing energy directives and implementing new policy strategies.

REPowerEU. In May 2022, the European Commission published the [REPowerEU](#) plan designed to diversify supplies, reduce demand and increase energy efficiency, as well as boosting renewable power.

Supply diversification. The EU has scaled-up its imports of LNG from suppliers such as Norway, Qatar and the United States. New LNG infrastructure has also been developed; however, the uneven distribution of LNG terminals and interconnection capacity across Europe continue to be a challenge (see EPRS [briefing](#)). Besides Russia, the EU's main pipeline gas suppliers are Algeria, Azerbaijan, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Gas storage. [Regulation](#) (EU) 2022/1032 of June 2022 on gas storage set a binding target of 80 % of EU storage capacity to be filled in by 1 November 2022, with a 90 % target set for subsequent years. With



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Member States swiftly implementing the regulation, storage facilities reached a [filling](#) rate of 80 % as early as September 2022 and of 90 % as early as October. However, concerns remain over achieving such storage levels in 2023 owing to geopolitical and meteorological uncertainties.

Energy saving and demand reduction. REPowerEU included an EU 'Save Energy' [plan](#), which proposed a number of short-, medium- and long-term energy-saving measures. Council [Regulation](#) (EU) 2022/1369 of August 2022 on coordinated demand reduction measures for gas set a voluntary 15 % target for reducing Member States' gas consumption between 1 August 2022 and 31 March 2023 (the target would become mandatory in emergencies). Council [Regulation](#) (EU) 2022/1854 of October 2022 on an emergency intervention to address high energy prices committed Member States to a binding 5 % reduction in peak electricity consumption, and a broader voluntary 10 % reduction in electricity consumption between 1 December 2022 and 31 March 2023. These temporary rules on gas and electricity demand reduction may, however, be prolonged.

Energy efficiency. REPowerEU also included a legislative [proposal](#) to amend the Energy Efficiency Directive by increasing the 2030 target for energy efficiency to 13 % (compared with a 2020 reference scenario). This came on top of the revision already proposed in the context of the European Green Deal and the '[fit for 55](#)' [package](#), aimed at increasing the target by 9 % (see EPRS [briefing](#)). That same legislative proposal included an amendment to the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, creating an obligation for Member States to ensure solar energy installations on public and residential buildings.

Renewable energy. The above-mentioned legislative proposal under REPowerEU also included an amendment to the Renewable Energy Directive, raising the share of renewables in the EU's final energy consumption to 45 % by 2030. This was in addition to the already ongoing 'fit for 55' revision, which proposes a 40 % target (see EPRS [briefing](#)). Moreover, the REPowerEU plan included a solar energy [strategy](#), putting forward a target of over 320 GW (gigawatts) of newly installed solar photovoltaic capacity by 2025, and almost 600 GW by 2030. These initiatives were followed by Council [Regulation](#) (EU) 2022/2577 of 22 December 2022 laying down a framework to accelerate deployment of renewable energy. The regulation aims to simplify permit-granting procedures for renewable energy projects, in particular solar installations, heat pumps, and projects involving the repowering of renewable energy plants.

To ensure energy security in 2023, the EU is facing the **multi-pronged challenge** of finding ways to continue: curbing its energy consumption; making energy efficiency improvements; accelerating the roll-out of renewables and domestic energy production; expanding its LNG capacity; increasing gas supply diversification; and strengthening its strategic autonomy in the energy field, while making sure the clean energy transition is in line with EU climate goals.

European Parliament position

In a [resolution](#) of April 2022 on the 'Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 24-25 March 2022: including the latest developments in the war against Ukraine and the EU sanctions against Russia and their implementation', the European Parliament called for the establishment of common strategic energy reserves and energy purchasing mechanisms at EU level to increase energy security and reduce external energy dependency and price volatility.

In its May 2022 [resolution](#) on 'The social and economic consequences for the EU of the Russian war in Ukraine – reinforcing the EU's capacity to act', Parliament stressed 'the importance of ensuring energy sovereignty and independence from Russian supplies and more strategic autonomy and energy security, by upgrading and ensuring major investment in the EU's energy infrastructure, including on interconnections and cross-border infrastructure for renewable energy production, and energy efficiency'.

In its [resolution](#) of October 2022 on 'The EU's response to the increase in energy prices in Europe', Parliament highlighted the role of 'investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency and the necessary infrastructure, including targeted, well-defined cross-border projects with investments through Next Generation EU and REPowerEU' in helping the EU achieve energy sovereignty, open strategic autonomy and energy security.

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