

**Question for written answer E-000027/2023
to the Commission**

Rule 138

Lars Patrick Berg (ECR)

Subject: Bulgarian natural gas market

Despite various efforts by the Commission (in particular the Directorates-General for Energy and for Competition) to liberalise Central and Eastern European gas markets, there is still a lack of real competition in the Bulgarian markets for natural gas. The state-owned Bulgargaz holds a near monopolistic position. Potential competitors have little chance of entering the market under reasonable conditions.

In response to pressure from the Commission and following fines totalling EUR 77 million on Bulgargaz and Bulgartransgaz, Bulgaria introduced the Gas Release Programme in 2019. This programme intended to increase the liquidity in the market by making it compulsory for Bulgargaz to make significant amounts of gas available to third parties via auctions on the national trading platform.

However, in December the Bulgarian Parliament adopted legislation suspending the Gas Release Programme. The adoption process lacked scrutiny and transparency.

1. What is the Commission's view on the suspension of the Gas Release Programme as of 1 January 2023?
2. Has the Commission engaged with local stakeholders regarding the decision suspend the Gas Release Programme?
3. Did the Commission engage with the relevant Bulgarian authorities when the Bulgarian Parliament's plans to suspend the Gas Release Programme were announced, and if so what was the outcome of these contacts?

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