

Report

EIN Policy Roundtable

The Black Sea Region: Energy as a Strategic and Integration Factor

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1. The discussion was framed by two issues. First, there is the strategic need for Europe to ensure a secure supply of energy, where ‘secure’ is taken to mean both safe and reliable. Second, there is the recognition that energy lies at the core of the European integration project from its origins as a Coal and Steel Community. The two issues overlap because, in a world with increasingly competing demands for energy supply (and source diversification), the EU will need to be active in cooperating with third countries to guarantee its supply; in certain cases that guarantee would be stronger in the context of wider institutional cooperation and integration, within the current EU-27 and beyond.
2. The European demand for energy needs to be seen in a global perspective that encompasses certain trends – climate change, the urbanisation of humanity, world population growth and economic development (and the consequent greater demand for energy inputs) – plus three crises that are linked to the energy crisis – those of food, finance and security. A climate change strategy based solely on mitigation is unlikely to be sufficient, particularly if it distorts market/information mechanisms. A successful strategy will need to give due weight to adaptation, which must include: an appropriate regulatory framework that aids access to relevant knowledge and information and the consideration of all feasible energy sources. In other words, good governance ought to be considered an integral part of a strategy of environmental adaptation (and vice-versa).
3. A comprehensive consideration of energy mixes must include nuclear energy, which, however, raises issues (particularly security and waste disposal) that concern everyone and not just the states that select it. The recent experience of Japan with the accident in Fukushima is important: but also ambiguous. On the one hand, the accident showed the resilience of the plants and the site is now very stable and no longer has emergency status. On the other hand, in the context of 100,000 evacuees, the problematic disposal of Fukushima’s waste (which will take several decades) and the stigmatised status of Fukushima (today a symbol of contamination), the insistence on the continuing importance of nuclear energy has become politically difficult in Japan, as it has become elsewhere. Evidently, in the European context the discussion

can only proceed if accompanied by an insistence on uniformly high standards in all Member States and on further research on all aspects of nuclear energy.

4. The afore-mentioned strategic considerations underline further the importance of the Black Sea region, an area that includes important source- and transit-countries from a European perspective. However, energy security is here linked to multiple security concerns, economic, political as well as military. 'Network integration' needs to encompass not just investment in infrastructure (such as transport) but also political cooperation that is proportionate to the challenge of providing good governance (so that, for example, the peaceful resolution of conflict is enhanced). Otherwise, the several projects that are currently underway (although they are not to be found at the same stage of development nor do they have the same likelihood of completion) could be jeopardised. In other words, the EU needs to be an active partner in supporting a shared regional framework. Energy-source diversification and sustainability of resources call for sustainable partnerships, which will only be possible if the region is stable.