

Slovakia energy transition

Slovakia has taken over the presidency of the V4 countries (which include also Poland, Hungary and Czechia) in an unprecedented context following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, energy security threats to the entire Central and Eastern European region, high energy prices and an ongoing economic crisis.

Indeed, Slovakia is considering energy security to remain a common priority, especially after European countries agreed to phase out the dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports as soon as possible, taking into account national circumstances. In fact, the country has one of the highest dependencies on Russian oil and gas among the EU Member States as it imports approximately 87 per cent of its natural gas and two-thirds of its oil from Russia.

"Slovakia is strongly dependent on Russian oil, natural gas and also nuclear fuel from the TVEL company," points out Veronika Oravcová, Research Fellow at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. "Although it has experienced total cessation of gas supplies in 2009, except for diversification of routes, the main supplier has remained the same."

"Given the nature of energy infrastructure, this will be challenging especially in the field of natural gas, as Slovakia has the second largest gas infrastructure in Europe (after the Netherlands)," she tells CEENERGYNEWS. "Also slow deployment of renewables and delays in finishing two nuclear reactors (there are 10 years of delay already) are challenging."

Regarding natural gas supplies, the Slovak Presidency will continue to cooperate on ensuring further efficient use of the gas infrastructure. An important milestone was already reached earlier in May when the construction works to connect the Polish and Slovak transmission systems were completed. Slovakia will also promote new LNG infrastructure development and interconnections between the V4 countries. In this regard, at the end of March, the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia Ivan Korcok discussed LNG production and energy security with Qatar.

When it comes to nuclear energy, Slovakia considers it as a prerequisite for achieving climate neutrality in the V4 region and the EU. The country will make efforts to ensure a level playing field for all low-carbon technologies in the EU relevant policies and funds and to reflect the benefits of nuclear energy in the EU policies.

"The main problems are in the heating sector, transport and industry," she says. "Decarbonisation of these three sectors while considering the issue of energy poverty (there is no definition and systematic approach to energy poverty) and maintaining the current level of employment will be very challenging."

She also reminds us that Slovakia has large industrial players in various industry sectors, such as fertilisers,

aluminium, cement, steel and automotive (having the largest steel producer in the region and four automotive companies with the announced fifth one).

"Slovakia has been cooperating with its neighbouring countries especially in the so-called Visegrad four format together with Czechia, Hungary and Poland," recalls Mrs Oravcov?. "However, this cooperation is not institutionalised (despite there is always one country that holds the presidency and sets the agenda, but there are no binding goals and outcomes) and is mainly ad hoc. Cooperation is crucial also with other countries, such as Ukraine, that has been connected to electricity trade in the EU."

"Also, Slovakia can cooperate with other countries on financial incentives and programmes to compensate for high energy prices and to deploy energy efficiency measures," Mrs Oravcov? underlines.

The Slovak Presidency will continue the discussion on proposals in the final stage of negotiations on the Fit for 55 Package in order to reflect as much as possible the principles of a socially just transition and technological neutrality in the EU climate policy. Another important issue to be discussed is nature and biodiversity protection. In connection with the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 particular attention will be paid to the target to increase the surface of strictly protected areas and to the expected legislative proposal on the restoration of ecosystems.

On forests and forestry, the Slovak Presidency's priority will be to promote sustainable forest management, including close-to-nature practices, particularly as part of the implementation of the new EU Forest Strategy for 2030. The main objective will be to continue effective cooperation and sharing of information and experience among V4 countries, especially in light of current EU legislative proposals that relate to forests in order to promote common interests at the EU level and possibly in other international organisations and processes.

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