

EU agrees gradual oil embargo on Russia, gives Hungary exemptions



Reuters / Brussels

European Union leaders have agreed an embargo on Russian oil imports that will kick in around the turn of the year – and for now exempts the pipeline imports that Hungary and two other landlocked Central European states rely on.

The ban, agreed overnight after weeks of wrangling, aims to remove 90% of Russia's crude imports into the 27-nation bloc within eight months or so, officials said.

It is the toughest sanction yet on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, and one that will affect the EU itself.

Russia provided just over a quarter of EU oil imports in 2020, while Europe is the destination for nearly half of Russia's crude and petroleum product exports.

“The sanctions have one clear goal: To prompt Russia to end this war, to withdraw its troops, and to agree a sensible and fair peace with Ukraine,” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said.

Ukraine said they would deprive the “Russian military machine” of tens of billions of dollars.

French President Emmanuel Macron said nothing could be ruled out regarding further sanctions, although other leaders poured cold water on the idea of banning purchases of Russian gas, which Europe depends on heavily.

EU countries will have six months to stop imports of seaborne Russian crude and eight months for refined products, the European Commission said.

That timeline will start once the sanctions are formally adopted, which EU states aim to do this week.

The deal was reached only after the EU’s other leaders agreed to give Hungary a free pass, having failed to win it over in weeks of talks.

Two-thirds of the Russian oil imported by the EU comes by tanker and the rest through the Druzhba pipeline.

Poland and Germany are among the pipeline importers, but have pledged to stop by the end of the year.

Landlocked Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic all get their Russian oil from Druzhba and account for the 10% of imports temporarily exempted from the embargo.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said his country had also secured an exemption until the end of 2024, since its refinery is designed to receive only Russian crude.

Oil prices rose after the EU’s agreement, stoking inflation, which hit a record 8.1% year-on-year in euro zone countries this month.

The oil embargo follows an earlier ban on Russian coal and allows the bloc to impose a sixth round of sanctions that includes cutting Russia’s biggest bank, Sberbank, off from the SWIFT international transaction system.

Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the package would also ban EU firms from insuring or reinsuring ships carrying Russian oil. Several countries already want to start work on a seventh round, but Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer said it could not include gas – where Russia supplies a third of EU needs.

“Russian oil is much easier to compensate for...gas is completely different, which is why a gas embargo will not be an issue in the next sanctions package,” Nehammer said.

Russian analysts and traders said the phasing-in of the embargo gave Moscow time to find new customers in Asia.

“Although the measures announced by the European Union look threatening, we don’t see a crippling impact on the Russian oil sector – neither imminent, nor in six months,” analysts at Sinara Investment Bank said.

Beyond the sanctions, EU leaders asked the bloc’s executive Commission to explore options to tackle soaring energy prices. These include “temporary import price caps”, which should be explored with international partners, their conclusions said.

They also endorsed a Commission plan to wean the EU off all Russian fossil fuels within years through a faster rollout of renewable energy, improvements in saving energy, and more investments in energy infrastructure.

And they called for better EU-wide contingency planning in case of further gas supply shocks.

Moscow on Wednesday cut gas supplies to the Netherlands for refusing to comply with a demand to pay in roubles, having already cut off Poland, Bulgaria and Finland.

**بارودي في مؤتمر أثينا : يمكن
لأوروبا أن تخفف من أزماتها عبر
الطاقة النظيفة في البحر الأبيض
المتوسط**



المركزية- حاضر الخبير الدولي في شؤون الطاقة رودي بارودي عن صناعة الطاقة العالمية خلال مؤتمر أثلينا الذي انعقد الأسبوع الفائت تحت عنوان "حوارات الطاقة 2022"، حيث لفت إلى أنه "يمكن لأوروبا أن تخفف من أزمته في مجال الطاقة من خلال الدعم والاستثمار في طفرة الطاقة النظيفة في منطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط".

وجاء في مداخلته: "خلال السنوات الأخيرة، دارت كل المناقشات العلمية في صناعة الطاقة العالمية حول موضوعين: تغيير المناخ وتقلبات أسعار السوق.

هناك، بالطبع، ضغوطات متزايدة لاستبدال الوقود الأحفوري بموارد الطاقة المتجددة مثل الرياح والطاقة الشمسية. والهدف من ذلك هو الجمع بين موارد طاقة جديدة مستدامة بيئيًا وقابلة للاستمرار اقتصاديًا، كذلك الدمج بين زيادة الوعي وتحسين التكنولوجيا يجعلنا أقرب إلى تحقيق كلا الهدفين.

لطالما كانت إحدى المشاكل الرئيسية تكمن في أن هذا التغيير لا يمكن أن يتم بين ليلة وضحاها. إن إنتاج وأداء وحجم الاتكال على المصادر النظيفة والصديقة للبيئة ليس كافيا بعد لتلبية الطلب بالكامل، وسيطلب الوصول إلى تلك المرحلة سنوات طويلة من التخطيط والاستثمار والبناء. إذا أخذنا التقنيات المتوفرة في وضعها الحالي قبل أن يتم استبدالها بالتقنيات الحديثة، فإن النقص الناتج سيؤدي إلى ارتفاع الأسعار، مما سيزيد من تكاليف المعيشة والتسبب في

انهيار الاقتصادات بأكملها. من ناحية أخرى، إذا انتظرنا وقتًا طويلاً قبل التخلي عن موارد الطاقة العالمية المنتجة لانبعاثات الكربون، فإن التغيرات المناخية تهدد بإلحاق أضرار أكبر من سابقها.

من البديهي القول إنه كانت هناك دائمًا عملية موازنة دقيقة في هذا المنحى، فقد أجبرت تقلبات الأسواق صانعي السياسات مراراً على إعادة النظر في خططهم وإعادة التفكير فيها وإعادة ضبطها. ثم جاءت جائحة كورونا (كوفيد - 19) التي تسببت بضغط غير مسبوق على الإنتاج والاستهلاك على حد سواء. وقد نجحت مجموعة حلول من الفئات العامة والخاصة في التغلب على أسوأ ما في تلك العاصفة بشكل مثير للدهشة. لكن التعافي العالمي لا يزال هشاً وغير متوازن لا سيما في ضوء الانتشار الواسع للتضخم وانهيار خطوط الإمداد.

أما الآن تلوح أمامنا أزمة جديدة تهدد موارد الطاقة وتتسبب بصدمات قوية قد تؤدي إلى انهيار معاييرنا الجديدة والتسبب بأسوأ موجة كساد في التاريخ الحديث. أشير بالطبع إلى الحرب في أوكرانيا والتي لم تكشف فقط عن اعتماد أوروبا المفرط والخطير على الغاز الطبيعي وواردات الطاقة الأخرى من روسيا، ولكنها كشفت أيضاً إلى أي مدى يمكن أن يسبب اختلال هذه العلاقة من فوضى في العالم أجمع. منذ أن شنت موسكو غزوها للأراضي الأوكرانية في أواخر شباط / فبراير، كان الاتحاد الأوروبي متردداً في فرض عقوبات على قطاع صناعة الطاقة الروسية لأنه يفتقر إلى بدائل أخرى بسبب عدم امتلاكه لمصادر متنوعة من الطاقة ومورديها بشكل كاف.

تجري في العديد من البلدان بعض التحركات التي طال انتظارها لزيادة قدرتها على التكيف، لكن التوقيت يزيد من التحديات بطرق عدة. فعلى سبيل المثال تم رفض أو تأخير المقترحات المختلفة لمد خطوط أنابيب الغاز من شمال إفريقيا وآسيا الوسطى، والتي قد تمر بالأراضي الروسية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، قررت بعض الحكومات الأوروبية في السنوات الأخيرة، إغلاق محطات الطاقة لديها التي تعمل على الفحم و / أو الطاقة النووية، ما جعلها تفتقد إلى المرونة والقابلية في التعويض عن الغاز الطبيعي الروسي واستبداله بموارد وأنواع أخرى من الوقود. كما تعاني القارة أيضاً من عجز في القدرة على إعادة معالجة الغاز ليكون قابلاً للاستهلاك، ما يعني أنها لا تستطيع الاستغناء كلياً عن الغاز المستورد عبر الأنابيب الروسية، واستبدالها بشحنات الغاز الطبيعي المسال المنقولة بحراً من دول أخرى.

هناك حلول لكل هذه المشاكل، وبعضها قيد التنفيذ بالفعل:

- تقوم ألمانيا حالياً ببناء محطتين جديدتين لاستقبال الغاز الطبيعي المسال، وتقوم هولندا بتوسيع طاقتها الاستيعابية الحالية، كذلك أكدت اليونان مؤخراً أن لديها خططاً في نفس الاتجاه.

- تمتلك إسبانيا خطوط أنابيب غاز داخلية وكذلك تمتلك القدرة الاحتياطية لإعادة تحويل الغاز المسال إلى غاز قابل للاستهلاك، لكنها تفتقد إلى القدرة على زيادة الإنتاج والضح إلى باقي الدول الأوروبية. لذلك فإنه من المنطقي القول إن الوقت قد حان لربط شبكة الأنابيب الإسبانية بفرنسا، ما يتيح للغاز أن يتدفق إلى الشبكة الأوروبية.

- من المنطقي أيضاً الإسراع في وضع الخطط لإنشاء خط أنابيب جديد آخر و / أو زيادة القدرة على نقل الغاز من أذربيجان ومناطق أخرى في آسيا الوسطى إلى تركيا، ما يُتيح لإمدادات الغاز هذه أن تدخل الأسواق الأوروبية.

- يمكن أيضاً لأوروبا أن تعزز أمنها في الطاقة من خلال المساعدة على تطوير حقول الغاز ألغنية بشكل متزايد في شرق البحر الأبيض المتوسط، والتي يمكن بعد ذلك ربط إنتاجها عن طريق خط أنابيب تحت البحر و / أو فوق الأرض إلى البر الرئيسي الأوروبي.

- سيتم أيضاً تعزيز الفائدة من هذه الخطوات وغيرها بشكل كبير من خلال بناء مرافق تخزين جديدة لكل من الغاز الطبيعي المسال والغاز التقليدي، مما سيجعل أوروبا أكثر صلابة أمام انقطاع إمدادات الغاز في المستقبل.

- نظراً لقرار الاتحاد الأوروبي الجاد في فك قيود سياسته الخارجية والتوقف عن اعتماده على الغاز الروسي، فمن الممكن أيضاً تأجيل إغلاق محطات الإنتاج التي تعمل على الفحم والطاقة النووية والإسراع بتنفيذ مشاريع الطاقة النظيفة، حقول الطاقة الشمسية، ومزارع الرياح على وجه الخصوص.

- بالإضافة إلى الغاز الذي يجري ضخه عبر الأنابيب، تتلقى إسبانيا الكهرباء المولدة من مزارع الطاقة الشمسية في شمال إفريقيا، كما أن هنالك مجال كبير جداً لإنشاء شبكات مشتركة مماثلة عبر المنطقة الأورو-متوسطية.

• لعل الحل الأفضل على المدى الطويل هو أن نغتني أوروبا الفرصة من خلال استثمارها في مجالات إنتاج الطاقة ذات الإمكانيات الكبيرة بواسطة الرياح البحرية في منطقة المتوسط.

تجدد الإشارة هنا إلى أنني نشرت منذ مدة وجيزة كتابًا جديدًا بعنوان "المناخ والطاقة في منطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط: ماذا يعني الاقتصاد الأزرق لمستقبل أكثر خضرة؟". لقد أكملت كتابته قبل اندلاع الحرب في أوكرانيا، وكان هدفي من وراء كتابته التركيز على خفض انبعاثات الكربون أكثر من التقليل على الاعتماد على الغاز الروسي. لكن الأزمة الحالية تجعل موضوع الكتاب أكثر أهمية من أي وقت مضى. وتذهب التوصية الأساسية للكتاب إلى أنه يمكن لأوروبا أن تستفيد بشكل كبير من برنامج لتوليد الطاقة عبر تطوير مرافق استفادة من الرياح البحرية في حوض المتوسط. كما يتضمن الكتاب تقديرات لإمكانيات استفادة كل دولة أورو-متوسطية من الرياح البحرية، والارقام في تزايد.

أساساً، فإن الاستفادة الكاملة من هذه الإمكانيات - في المياه الساحلية وحدها - يمكن أن تولد ما لا يقل عن 500 مليون ميغاواط من الكهرباء. بمعنى آخر ما يعادل مجموع إنتاج مولدات الطاقة النووية في العالم أجمع! ويجدر الإشارة أن هذه التقديرات واقعية، وقد تم التوصل إليها من خلال دراسات شاملة وحثيثة للغاية تستند إلى التكنولوجيا القياسية المستخدمة في أيامنا هذه.

يعيدنا هذا إلى موضوعنا الأساسي، فنظرياً، كل ما سبق ذكره من محطات الغاز الطبيعي المسال، وخطوط الأنابيب الجديدة، وأعمال التطوير لزيادة عمر محطات توليد الطاقة التي تعمل على الفحم وتلك التي تعمل على الطاقة النووية، وتسخير الإمكانيات الهائلة للبحر الأبيض المتوسط - كل هذا سيتطلب أموالاً طائلة. ستكون السنوات الثلاث إلى الخمس المقبلة حاسمة، ليس فقط من أجل تقليل الاعتماد على الغاز الروسي، وبالتالي استعادة استقلالية السياسة الخارجية للاتحاد الأوروبي، ولكن أيضاً لتكثيف مصادر الطاقة المتجددة التي ستساعد في الحفاظ على تغيرات المناخ ضمن حدود يمكن التحكم فيه.

يمكن لمنطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط - بما في ذلك الدول المطلة عليها من مكونات الاتحاد الأوروبي وتلك غير التابعة له - أن تكون جزءاً كبيراً من هذا المسعى لتحقيق قابلية مزدوجة لمواجهة التحديات الاقتصادية والبيئية على حدٍ سواء. تعتبر الاستثمارات الأوروبية في إنتاج الطاقة في بلدان الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا

منطقية لعدة أسباب ومنها، انخفاض قيمة اليد العاملة وتكاليف البناء الأخرى، فضلاً عن إمدادات طاقة أكثر تنوعاً والتي يمكن الاعتماد عليها بشكل أكبر. ناهيك عن المزايا المساعدة على تطوير اقتصادات أقوى واستقرار سياسي أكبر على أطراف أوروبا. ستساعد هاتان النتيجةتان على تحسين الفقر واليأس، وتحد من تدفق المهاجرين غير الشرعيين، الذين لقي الآلاف منهم حتفهم أثناء محاولتهم عبور البحر المتوسط في القوارب المتهالكة والمثقلة بالأعباء التي زودهم بها مهربو البشر عديمو الضمير.

سيداتي وسادتي، أعتقد أنه يمكننا أن نتفق جميعاً على أن هذه ليست أولويات ثانوية. على العكس من ذلك، فهي أولويات استثنائية تتطلب اتخاذ تدابير استثنائية، وقد تكون الآثار المترتبة على عدم التصرف كارثية في السنوات القادمة. وبالتالي، فإن المطلوب ليس فقط أن تتعاون الدول الأعضاء في الاتحاد الأوروبي لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، كما يفعل البعض منها حالياً، ولكن المطلوب من جميع الهيئات ذات الصلة أن تتقدم وتتدخل وتشارك كما لم تفعل من قبل.

حول هذا الموضوع بالذات، تلقينا بعض الأخبار الجيدة جداً مؤخراً. فقبل حوالي أسبوع، حددت المفوضية الأوروبية خطة جديدة لإنهاء اعتماد أوروبا على الغاز الروسي، خطة تتطلب إنفاق أكثر من 200 مليار يورو على مدى السنوات الخمس المقبلة. هذا رقم كبير، لكن الخطة تحتاج الآن إلى التمويل.

ستتطلب المشاريع المعنية دعماً هائلاً، سواء المباشر منها أو غير المباشر، وذلك إذا أريد لها أن تبدأ في العمل بسرعة، وإذا كانت ستفعل ذلك دون أن تخضع لفرض ضرائب غير مستدامة و / أو دون أن تتأثر منها أعباء ديون على الاقتصادات الفردية. هذا يعني أنه ليس فقط على الاتحاد الأوروبي نفسه أن يبدأ بالتمويل، ولكن على كل من بنك الاستثمار الأوروبي والبنك الدولي وصندوق النقد الدولي - أن يبدأوا بالتمويل كذلك. كما يجب على القطاع الخاص إن يشارك في هذا الإجراء أيضاً.

ستكون هناك فوائد كبيرة إذا اعتمدنا على مثل هذا البرنامج، وبالمقابل ستكون هناك أزمات أكبر إذا لم نفعل ذلك. لذلك لا يمكن اعتبار الحلول المذكورة انفاقاً منتظماً، بل هي بدلا من ذلك ترقى لتكون استثمارات ضرورية وتاريخية في مستقبل أفضل للقارة بأكملها ولجيرانها في الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا، وبإمكاني أن أقول وكذلك الأمر بالنسبة للعالم أجمع.

لسوء الحظ، لقد فات الأوان لمنع الحرب في أوكرانيا. لكن كلما تحركت أوروبا بشكل أسرع وفعال لإنهاء اعتمادها على الغاز الروسي، وتبنت شراكة أوثق مع جيرانها في البحر الأبيض المتوسط، والتي ستحقق الاستقلالية الكاملة لسياساتها الخارجية، كلما تمكنت من المساعدة في استعادة السلام - ومنع حدوث كوارث مماثلة في المستقبل".

Dismantling the fossil-fuel economy at Stockholm+50



Our planet is facing a triple crisis of climate, nature, and pollution, with one common cause: the fossil-fuel economy. Oil, gas, and coal are at the root of runaway climate disruption, widespread biodiversity loss, and pervasive plastic pollution. The conclusion is clear and must be paramount when political leaders gather in Stockholm this week to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Any effort to

address these existential threats to human and ecological health will mean little as long as the fossil-fuel economy remains intact.

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently noted, fossil fuels are choking our planet. In the last decade, their combustion accounted for 86% of global carbon dioxide emissions, for which just a few actors bear overwhelming responsibility. In fact, nearly two-thirds of all CO₂ emitted since the Industrial Revolution can be traced to just 90 polluters, mostly the largest fossil-fuel producers.

Yet, rather than reining in the polluters, the world's governments are currently planning to allow more than twice as much fossil-fuel production in 2030 than would be consistent with the goal – agreed under the 2015 Paris climate agreement – of limiting global warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. And when it comes to the damage wrought by fossil fuels, higher global temperatures and intensifying extreme weather events are only the beginning.

Last year, the UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights, Marcos A Orellana, affirmed what frontline communities have long known: fossil-fuel production generates toxic compounds and pollutes air, water, and soil. Air pollution from burning fossil fuels was responsible for about one in five deaths worldwide in 2018. Moreover, oil and gas are the building blocks of the toxic chemicals, pesticides, and synthetic fertilisers that are pushing ecosystems and species to extinction. These fossil-fuel-based products perpetuate an economic and agro-industrial model that drives deforestation, destroys biodiversity, and threatens human health.

Fossil fuels are also behind the proliferation of plastics, which are accumulating in even the most remote areas of the planet, from the top of Mount Everest to the bottom of the Mariana Trench. Ninety-nine percent of all plastics are made from chemicals derived from fossil fuels, predominantly oil and gas. The production of petrochemical feedstocks for plastics and the use of fossil fuels throughout the plastics value chain are boosting demand for oil and gas and exposing

millions of people to toxic pollution.

As if that were not enough, fossil fuels foment and fund violent conflict around the world. The fossil-fuel economy is enabling Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis it has created. In the seven years after Russia illegally annexed Crimea, eight of the world's biggest fossil-fuel companies enriched Russia's government by an estimated \$95.4bn. Russia's revenues from energy exports have soared since the invasion of Ukraine in February, which drove up prices. And big Western oil companies, cashing in on the conflict, have raked in record profits.

Instead of facing accountability, the oil and gas industry and its allies are exploiting the Ukraine crisis to push for even more drilling, fracking, and exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) all around the world. But new fossil-fuel infrastructure, which will take years to bring online, will do nothing to address the current energy crisis. Instead, it will only deepen the world's dependence on fossil fuels, enhance producers' ability to wreak havoc on people and the planet, and push a climate-safe future further out of reach.

As world leaders gather for Stockholm+50, breaking our addiction to fossil fuels should be the top priority. Yet fossil fuels are conspicuously absent from the official concept note and agenda, and they are barely mentioned in the background papers of the three Leadership Dialogues that are supposed to inform the summit's outcome.

This omission is no accident. The fossil-fuel lobby has decades of experience sowing doubt about the damage the industry is causing and obscuring the link between fossil fuels and the toxic chemicals used in industrial agriculture and plastic products. When outright denial has not worked, the industry has touted false solutions, including speculative technological fixes, market mechanisms with gigantic loopholes, and misleading "net-zero" pledges. The goal is to divert political attention from the urgent action needed to end reliance on fossil fuels and scale-up proven approaches, like renewable energy, agroecology, and plastic reduction and

reuse.

Such transformative action is precisely what Stockholm+50 must deliver. Participating governments and decision-makers must acknowledge that fossil fuels are the main driver of the triple crisis we face, and they must set a bold agenda for halting fossil-fuel expansion, ensuring a rapid and equitable decline of oil, gas, and coal, and accelerating a just transition to a fossil-free future.

One possible feature of such an agenda would be a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty – an initiative that has attracted wide support, including from thousands of civil-society organisations, hundreds of scientists and parliamentarians, more than 100 Nobel laureates, and dozens of municipal governments. To spur progress, a broad range of stakeholders – including representatives of indigenous communities, governments, international institutions, and academia – will gather the day before Stockholm+50 for the Pre-Summit on the Global Just Transition from Fossil Fuels.

In parallel with the Stockholm meeting, an intergovernmental negotiating committee, convened by the UN Environment Programme, is gathering in Dakar to develop a legally binding global plastics treaty. Crucially, the treaty will have to take a comprehensive approach that addresses the full plastic life cycle, beginning with fossil-fuel extraction.

If we have learned one thing in the 50 years since the first Stockholm conference, it is that a future tied to fossil fuels is no future at all. To tackle the converging crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and petrochemical and plastic pollution, Stockholm+50 has no alternative but to confront oil, gas, and coal head-on. – Project Syndicate

- *Nikki Reisch is Director of the Climate and Energy Program at the Center for International Environmental Law.*
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Saudi tucks away billions in oil money for next year



Bloomberg Riyadh/London

Saudi Arabia will hold billions of dollars from its oil windfall in a government current account until the end of the year, when it will decide how to distribute it – marking a shift in its strategy from previous boom periods.

In the past, higher oil prices and output would quickly translate into rising foreign reserves and deposits in local banks, and often lead to a swift boost in government spending. This time, the government won't spend the money until it's rebuilt reserves depleted during eight years of subdued oil prices. It could then use some of the cash to repay debts and pour it into state investment vehicles, including the powerful Public Investment Fund (PIF) and the National Development Fund, which focuses on domestic infrastructure.

“The surplus achieved in Q1 is shown in the government current

account and has not yet been deposited to government reserves nor transferred to other groups," Finance Minister Mohamed al-Jadaan said in a statement to Bloomberg. "This allocation will occur after the surplus is realized, which means after the closing of the fiscal year."

The government's current account held at the central bank rose by 70bn riyals (\$19bn) in the first quarter of the year, when Saudi Arabia reported a \$15bn budget surplus.

The finance ministry's comments solve a mystery that had stumped some analysts covering Saudi Arabia; they were waiting to find out where those billions of dollars would show up.

The world's largest crude exporter has seen revenues soar on the back of \$100 oil and rising production. Oil gross domestic product is expected to grow 19% this year, al-Jadaan said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

If crude prices remain that high, Saudi Arabia's total oil exports are estimated to reach \$287bn this year, according to Ziad Daoud, chief emerging markets economist at Bloomberg Economics.

Officials had previously said that much of the extra money would be used to accelerate efforts to diversify the economy away from oil – currently Saudi Arabia's main source of income.

"The windfall from the additional revenues that we will get from high oil prices will be essentially invested in resilience," Faisal Alibrahim, Minister of Economy and Planning, told Bloomberg in an interview at Davos. "Whether it's replenishing reserves, paying off debt or investing in unique transformational projects through our wealth fund, that really helps us accelerate the diversification plans."

The kingdom's \$600bn sovereign wealth fund, the PIF, is at the heart of Prince Mohamed bin Salman's plan to overhaul the economy and invest in new non-oil industries like tourism.

It owns most of the kingdom's mega-projects, including Neom – a \$500bn new city – as well as tourism developments on the Red Sea coast and a massive entertainment complex planned near Riyadh.

“The responsibility of boosting growth has shifted to state-owned entities ex-budget, led by PIF,” Mohamed Abu Basha, head of macroeconomic research at Egyptian investment bank EFG Hermes, wrote in a note. That leaves “the transmission of high oil prices to the economy more indirect than at any time in history.”

Reserves jumped in March, supported by dividend payments from oil giant Aramco. But the increase was smaller than it was in the same period last year, when oil prices averaged above \$60 a barrel.

One part of the economy that hasn’t benefited is the domestic banking system. In the past high oil prices would mean an influx of cheap deposits into the Saudi banks, helping to keep local currency lending rates low.

Yet Saudi banks are facing the tightest liquidity conditions since 2016, as measured by the three-month Saudi Interbank Offered Rate, or SAIBOR, despite soaring oil prices. It took off even before an overall 75 basis-point interest rate hike by the US Federal Reserve so far this year.

“The increase in SAIBOR rates reflects some of the lag between the surge in oil prices and the domestic liquidity boost,” said Carla Slim, economist at Standard Chartered Plc. “Excess liquidity in the banking system, as measured by volumes deposited in Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority’s reverse repo facility, has contracted sharply.”

The finance ministry said in its statement that money supply was ample.

Sun-starved Sweden turns to

solar to fill power void



Bloomberg

Sweden, known for its long dark winters with barely any daylight, is seeing a solar power boom.

Harnessing whatever sunshine the country gets is emerging as the quickest solution to fill part of the void left by two closed nuclear reactors in southern Sweden, where the biggest cities and industries are located. With shortages piling up in the region and consumers keen to secure green energy at stable prices, solar is quickly catching up with wind as developers put panels on rooftops and underutilised land in populated areas.

While the lack of sunlight is a hindrance, every bit of new electricity capacity will lower imports from Europe where prices are more than three times higher than in the rest of Sweden. Projects are also getting built quickly because developers are directly getting into power sales deals with consumers and aren't dependent on government support, said

Harald Overholm, CEO of Alight AB, which started Sweden's biggest solar plant this month.

Companies are targeting a quick ramp-up, pushing total capacity in the country to 2 gigawatt this year. That's more than the two nuclear reactors in Ringhals that were halted in 2020, and will close the gap with Denmark, an early mover in the industry in the region.

"We are very good at creating contracts directly with commercial partners that use power, and that is what drives our development," said Harald Overholm, CEO of Alight.

The past winter has demonstrated the hole left behind by the two atomic reactors, with the government facing the task of resolving a divergent market. While vast hydro and wind projects have kept the cost of electricity in the sparsely populated north in check, a lack of generating capacity and congested grids have forced the south at times to import power.

Berlusconi's bad break-up with Putin reveals Italy-Russia ties



Rome (AFP) – After a tycoon bromance, Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi is struggling to break up with Russia’s Vladimir Putin over the Ukraine war – like many in his country, where ties with Moscow run deep.

The billionaire former premier’s unwillingness to speak ill of Putin is echoed by other leading Italian politicians, while in the media, there are concerns that pro-Russian sentiment has warped into propaganda.

Prime Minister Mario Draghi is committed to NATO and the EU, strongly backing sanctions against Moscow, and at his urging a majority of Italy’s MPs approved sending weapons to help Ukraine defend itself.

But much of Draghi’s coalition government – Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, Matteo Salvini’s League and the once anti-establishment Five Star Movement (M5S) – has long pursued a “special relationship” with Moscow.

Italy used to have the largest Communist party in the West, and many businesses invested in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, while Russians in turn sought opportunities here.

Barely a month before the February 24 invasion, Putin spent

two hours addressing top Italian executives at a virtual meeting.

Beds, hats, parties

Berlusconi, 85, has been out of office for more than a decade but remains influential both in politics and through his media interests, as founder of the Mediaset empire.

He was an ardent admirer of the Russian leader, and a close chum – they stayed in each other’s holiday homes, skied together and were snapped sporting giant fur hats.

“They were two autocrats who mutually reinforced their image: power, physical prowess, bravado, glitz,” historian and Berlusconi author Antonio Gibelli told AFP.

Putin gave Berlusconi a four-poster bed, in which the Italian had sex with an escort in 2008, according to her tell-all book. He in turn gave Putin, 69, a duvet cover featuring a life-sized image of the two men.

In the months before the Ukraine war, Berlusconi continued to promote his close ties, including a “long and friendly” New Year’s Eve phone call.

It was not until April, two months after Russia’s invasion, that he publicly criticised the conflict, saying he was “disappointed and saddened” by Putin.

He has struggled to stay on message since then.

Speaking off the cuff in Naples last week, he said he thought “Europe should... try to persuade Ukraine to accept Putin’s demands”, before backtracking and issuing a statement in Kyiv’s support.

“Breaking the twinning with Putin costs Berlusconi dearly: he has to give up a part of his image,” Gibelli said.

Meanwhile, the leader of the anti-immigration League, Salvini, who has proudly posed in Putin T-shirts in the past, has argued against sending weapons to aid Ukraine.

The League did condemn Russia's military aggression, "no ifs and no buts", on February 24 when Russia invaded.

But an investigation by the L'Espresso magazine earlier this week found that, in the over 600 messages posted by Salvini on social media since Russia invaded, he had not once mentioned Putin by name.

He did so for the first time on Thursday, saying "dialogue" with Putin was good, and encouraging a diplomatic end to the war.

'Biased media'

Many pro-Russian figures are given significant airtime in the media, which itself is highly politicised.

"Italy is a G7 country with an incredibly biased media landscape," Francesco Galietti, founder of risk consultancy Policy Sonar, told AFP.

TV talk shows are hugely popular in Italy, and "one of the main formats of information" for much of the public, notes Roberta Carlini, a researcher at the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute.

But she warns they often "obscure facts".

Italy's state broadcaster RAI is being investigated by a parliamentary security committee for alleged "disinformation", amid complaints over the frequent presence of Russian guests on talks shows.

Commercial giant Mediaset is also in hot water after airing an

interview with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in which highly polemical claims went unchallenged.

It defended the interview, saying good journalism meant listening to "even the most controversial and divisive" opinions.

"RAI is a reflection of the political landscape, with its many pro-Russian parties. And Mediaset... well, Berlusconi is an old pal of Putin's, so what do you expect?" Galietti said.

He also points to a decades-long culture in Italy of allowing conspiracy theories – particularly on the interference of US spies in Italian politics – to circulate in the media unchallenged.

"You end up with a situation where Russia Today (RT) is considered as authoritative as the BBC," he said.

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Urgent efforts needed to ensure global food security



Food price increases are having devastating effects on the poorest and most vulnerable around the world.

People most impacted by higher food prices live in the developing world, where a larger percentage of incomes is spent on food.

Global food prices started to rise in mid-2020 when businesses shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic, straining supply chains.

The pandemic has had effects on global supply chains. In the early phase, lockdowns and mobility restrictions led to severe disruptions in various supply chains, causing supply shortages.

Farmers dumped out milk and let fruits and vegetables rot due to a lack of available truckers to transport goods to supermarkets, where prices spiked as consumers stockpiled food. A shortage of migrant labour was felt as lockdowns restricted movement across the world.

Since then, there have been problems with key crops in many parts of the world. Brazil, the world's top soybean exporter, suffered from severe drought in 2021.

China's wheat crop has been among the worst ever this year. Concerns about food security, heightened during the pandemic,

have led some countries to hoard staples to ward off future shortages, limiting supplies on the global market.

Food prices have also jumped. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February dramatically worsened the outlook for food prices.

According to the International Monetary Fund, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to rising energy and food prices, which will inevitably mean higher inflation globally. Both Russia and Ukraine are exporters of major commodities, and the disruptions from the war and sanctions have caused global prices to soar, especially for oil and natural gas.

Wheat prices are at record highs – Ukraine and Russia account for 30% of global wheat exports. These effects will lead inflation to persist longer than previously expected. The impact will likely be bigger for low-income countries and emerging markets, where food and energy are a larger share of consumption (as high as 50% in Africa).

The World Bank forecasts wheat prices could rise more than 40% in 2022. The Bank expects agricultural prices to fall in 2023 versus 2022. But that depends on increased crop supplies from Argentina, Brazil and the United States – by no means guaranteed.

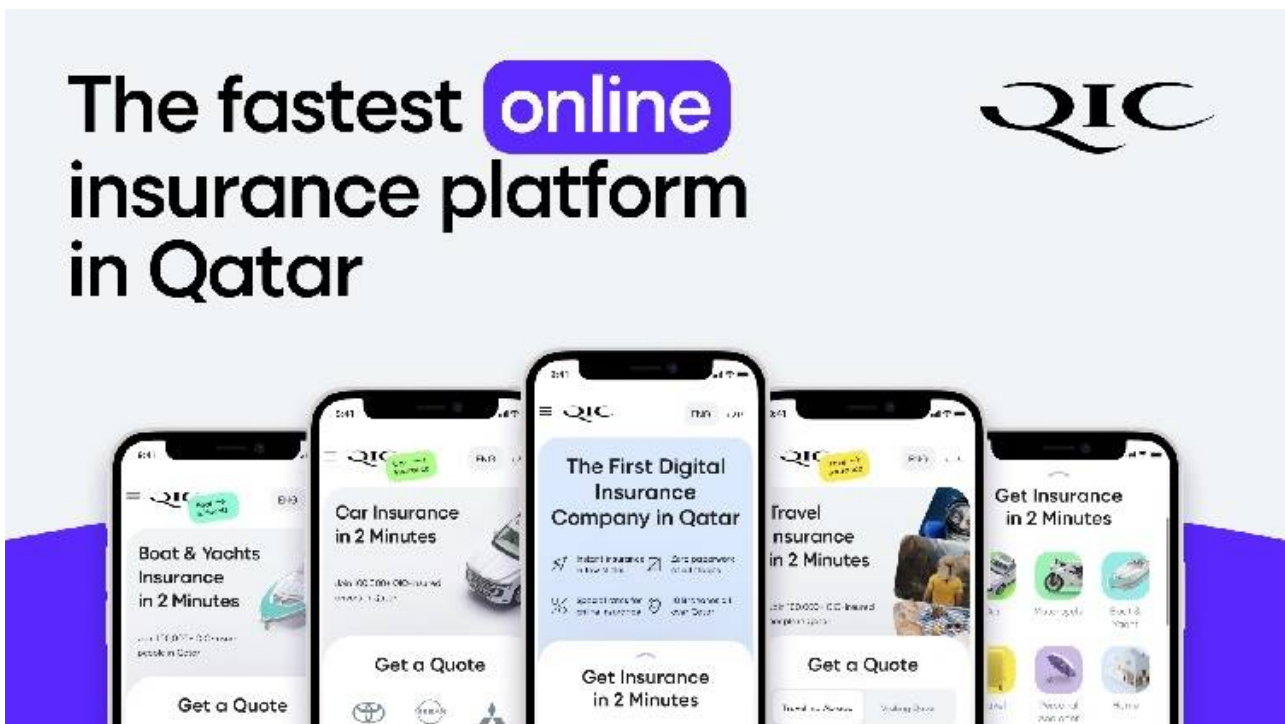
The World Bank is working with countries on the preparation of \$12bn of new projects for the next 15 months to respond to the food security crisis. These projects are expected to support agriculture, social protection to cushion the effects of higher food prices, and water and irrigation projects, with the majority of resources going to Africa and the Middle East, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and South Asia.

In addition, the World Bank's existing portfolio includes undisbursed balances of \$18.7bn in projects with direct links to food and nutrition security issues, covering agriculture and natural resources, nutrition, social protection, and other sectors.

Altogether, this would amount to over \$30bn available for implementation to address food insecurity over the next 15 months.

It is time countries made concerted efforts to increase the supply of energy and fertiliser, help farmers increase plantings and crop yields, remove policies that block exports and imports and ensure global food security.

QIC Launches the First and Fastest all-inclusive Online Portal to Get Insuran



qic.online allows customers to buy or renew their car, motorcycle, travel, home contents, boat & yacht, and personal accident insurance policies in just 2 minutes. The new portal offers instant covers comparison and product recommendation to help customers better identify the right insurance plans that suit their needs.

Doha, Qatar – Sunday 29th May 2022: Qatar Insurance Company (QIC), the leading insurer in Qatar and the Mena region, has

announced the launch of the first all-inclusive online portal, offering the fastest digital solution to buy and renew insurance policies in Qatar.

Developed with an innovative customer-centric approach, qic.online allows customers to buy their car, motorcycle, travel, home contents, boat & yacht, and personal accident policies in just 2 minutes, without any need to scan and submit paperwork, or to call or visit a QIC branch to complete the onboarding journey.

Available in both Arabic and English, the new insurance portal offers instant covers comparison, allowing customers to get complete information on policy types, in addition to product recommendation to help them better identify the right insurance covers that suit their driving, traveling, and living needs. The online portal also allows customers to compare policy prices and select their preferred payment plans, including paying their insurance premiums in monthly installments while enjoying enhanced security for payments made via debit and credit cards.

The portal's engaging design and modern interface properly support all display types and devices, allowing both new and existing customers to experience a simplified and intuitive navigation during both the onboarding and renewal processes. Customers can also request instant assistance from QIC's customer service at all stages of their onboarding journey via the 'Ask us' button and receive instant support from the QIC's customer service team all weekdays and round the clock.

For existing QIC customers, the portal offers a dedicated page for insurance renewals in just a few clicks by only entering their QID or policy number, and without any need to type their details linked to the QIC database anew. qic.online also hosts other features allowing customers to have extra control on their insurance needs, including upgrading policies and online claims management.

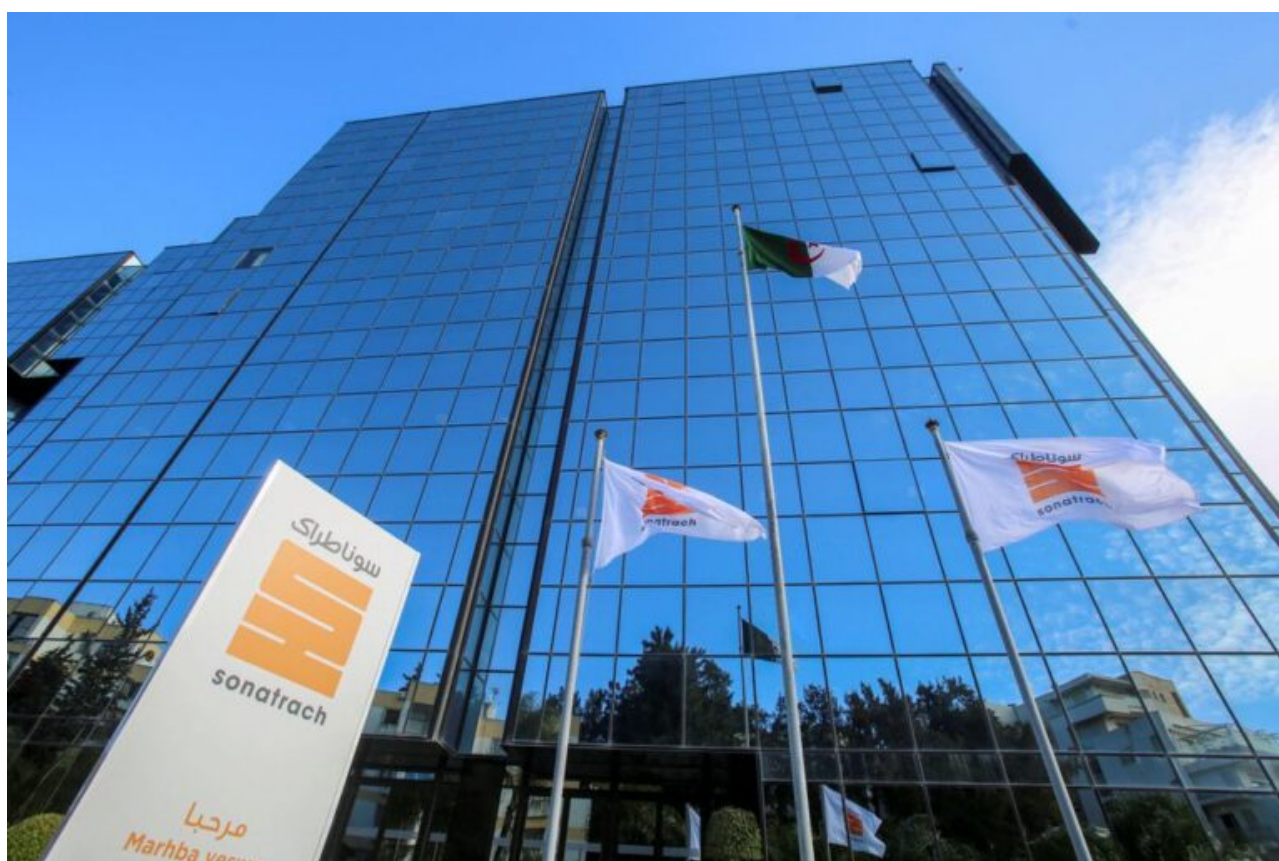


Commenting on the new portal launch, Mr. Ahmed Al Jarboey, QIC's Chief Operating Officer – Qatar operations, said: "We are happy to launch the first and fastest all-inclusive insurance portal in Qatar, and to become the only insurance company in the country that allows customers to buy insurance policies in just 2 minutes. qic.online is revolutionary at all levels, and it is certainly another significant step in our journey towards the full digitization of all our insurance products and services. We have achieved record levels of customers' reliance on digital channels over the past few months thanks to our relentless investments in developing our digital capabilities in line with our digital transformation strategy, and I have no doubt that qic.online will now be the one-stop shop that will allow further segments of our customers to be in control of all their insurance needs the way the like and in just a few clicks."

Qatar Insurance Company is a publicly listed composite insurer with a consistent performance history of over 57 years and a global underwriting footprint. Founded in 1964, QIC was the first domestic insurance company in the State of Qatar. Today, QIC is the market leader in Qatar and a dominant insurer in the GCC and MENA regions. QIC is also the largest insurance

company in the MENA region by gross written premium, profitability and total assets. It is listed on the Qatar Stock Exchange and has a market capitalization in excess of QAR 7.8 billion.

Eni, Sonatrach sign deal to boost Algeria gas exports to Italy



MILAN, May 26 (Reuters) – Energy group Eni (ENI.MI) and Sonatrach signed a deal to accelerate the development of gas fields in Algeria and the development of green hydrogen, part of moves to increase the north African country's gas exports towards Italy.

Italy, which last year sourced about 40% of its gas imports from Russia, has been scrambling to diversify its energy supply mix as the conflict in Ukraine escalates.

Algeria, Italy's second-biggest gas supplier last year, has been pumping Algerian gas to Italian shores since 1983 through the Transmed pipeline, which runs to Sicily.

The gas production volumes expected from the areas covered by Thursday's agreement are equal to some 3 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year and will contribute to increasing the export capacity of Algeria to Italy through the Transmed pipeline, Eni said.

The signing is part of the agreement reached by the two energy groups in April, when they announced they would gradually raise gas flows in the pipeline starting this year and reach 9 billion cubic metres (bcm) of extra gas per year by 2023-24.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed in Rome by the top executives of the Italian and the Algerian groups in a ceremony witnessed by the President of Algeria Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

Algeria's gas exports to Italy climbed last year, jumping 76% to 21 billion cubic metres – 28% of overall consumption and second behind the 29 bcm from top supplier Russia.

The agreement will allow Sonatrach and Eni to evaluate the gas potential and opportunities for accelerated development at specific fields already discovered by Sonatrach in Algeria.

The Memorandum also covers the technical and economic evaluation for a green hydrogen pilot project in Bir Rebaa North (BRN) in the Algerian desert, with the goal of supporting the decarbonisation of the BRN gas plant operated by the SONATRACH-Eni GSE joint venture.

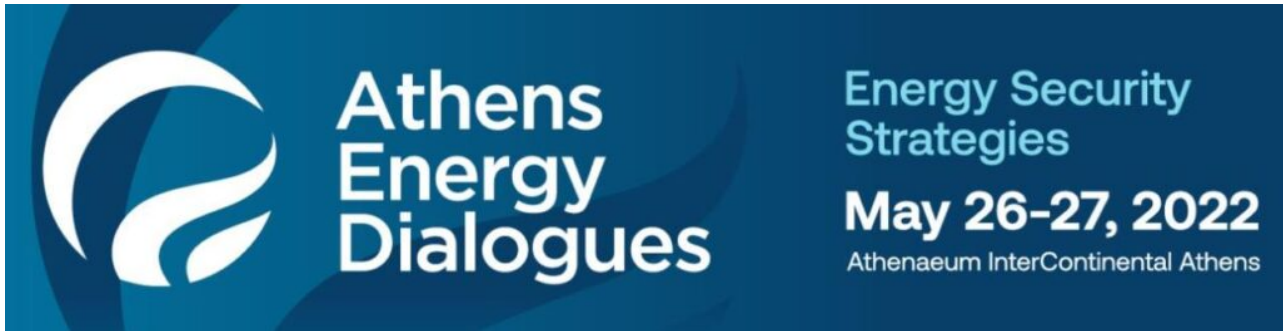
Eni is the main international energy company operating in

Algeria, where it has been present since 1981.

In the race to cut Rome's dependency from Russian gas, Italian ministers have tapped numerous countries like Congo Republic, Angola, Azerbaijan and Qatar.

Dr. Roudi Baroudi's "Climate and Energy in the Mediterranean: What the Blue Economy Means for a Greener Future" book launched at the Athens Energy Dialogues in Athens, Greece.





Dr. Baroudi: “The war in Ukraine has exposed not only Europe’s dangerous over-reliance on natural gas and other energy imports from Russia, but also the extent to which disrupting that relationship could wreak havoc around the world. Ever since Moscow launched its invasion in late February, the European Union has been hesitant to impose sanctions on Russia’s energy industry because it lacks other alternatives, and it lacks those alternatives because of a years-long hesitance to maintain a sufficiently diverse basket of sources and suppliers. The continent also suffers from inadequate regasification capacity, which means it cannot fully replace piped gas from Russia with seaborne loads of LNG from other countries.

Mr. Baroudi highlighted that there are solutions for all of these problems, and some are already under way. “Europe could also bolster its energy security by helping to develop the increasingly promising gas fields of the Eastern Mediterranean, the output of which could then be linked by undersea and/or overland pipeline to the European mainland. The utility of these and other moves would also be significantly enhanced by building new storage facilities for both LNG and conventional gas, which would make Europe a lot more resistant to future supply disruptions,” said Mr. Baroudi.

But most importantly in the long term, Europe needs to seize the opportunity presented by the great potential for offshore wind energy in the Mediterranean, since making full use of this potential – just in the coastal waters – could generate

at least some 500 MILLION megawatts of electricity: in other words, the same as the entire global nuclear industry”.

Full press release available here: <https://lnkd.in/gUTi4zT6>

Dr. Baroudi's book available here: <https://lnkd.in/gp8ePj2j>