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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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.

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.

Global LNG demand to more

than double to 800mn tonnes by 2050: GECF

Pratap John

Global LNG demand will more than double from 356mn tonnes in 2020 to 800mn tonnes by 2050, “fuelled by solid demand from Asia and a rise in gas use for powering hard-to-electrify sectors”, according to the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

The biggest regasification capacity additions to 2050 are expected in Asia Pacific, GECF said in its ‘Global Gas Outlook 2050’.

Total regasification capacity rose from 572mn tonnes per year (MTPY) in 2010 up to 947 MTPY in 2020.

By 2050, regasification capacity is projected to grow to 1465mn tonnes per year, significantly outrunning the actual projected LNG demand.

That will include, by 2050, almost 1050 MTPY in Asia, and 190 MTPY in Europe. China will top the list of regasification capacity by 2050 with almost 340 MTPY, followed by Japan with 210 MTPY, South Korea with over 150 MTPY and India with 100 MTPY, GECF said.

Some eight new regasification terminals were commissioned in

2020 with a total LNG regas capacity of 26 MTPY, primarily in Asia Pacific region as well as Latin America (Brazil, Puerto Rico). Gas infrastructure build-out, coal-to-gas switching and market deregulation are the main determinants for LNG demand growth.

South and Southeast Asia are likely to drive LNG demand growth in the future as the countries are investing heavily in gas pipelines and regasification terminals. India offers the most demand growth potential in the region due to the scale of its infrastructure expansion. The South and Southeast Asia region might grow its share of global LNG demand from 14% in 2020 to over 40% by 2050.

Around 150 MTPY of new LNG regasification terminals are under construction, of which about almost three-fourth, or 110 MTPY is in Asia Pacific, where the top countries are China (over 50 MTPY), India (20 MTPY) and 28 MTPY in the Middle East, in Kuwait and Bahrain.

By 2050, the majority of incremental growth in natural gas imports will be undoubtedly attributed to Asia Pacific with almost 650 bcm additions over 2020-2050.

Latin America and Europe, with total increases of 55 bcm and 35 bcm, respectively will follow. The underlying demand will be balanced out by supply increases from primarily Eurasia (285 bcm) Middle East (230 bcm) together with North America (160 bcm) and Africa (50 bcm) over the long term.

Asia Pacific will account for the highest share of global imports by 2050, while the share held by the European market will be gradually decreasing as import volumes increase slowly by 2030, GECF noted.

LNG liquefaction investment may have scaled up to $23bn

in 2021: GECF

Qatar’s $29bn FID on North Field expansion is a game-changer, noted GECF Global Gas Outlook 2050

LNG liquefaction investment that dropped in 2020 may have scaled up to more than $23bn in 2021 led by Qatar, US and Russia, according to Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

Qatar’s project, with a final investment decision (FID) of $29bn taken in February 2021 on North East Field expansion, which will add 33mn tonnes per year (mtpy) to the currently existing 77mtpy, is a game-changer, noted the GECF Global Gas Outlook 2050.

Asia Pacific, the main destination of the world’s LNG at present and by 2050, will represent the largest transformational challenge for the currently fragmented natural gas market. Asia Pacific with 70% share of LNG trade in 2020 to make up for even more impressive over 80% by 2050.

The top four largest LNG importers emerged in Asia Pacific and will remain so in 2050 with India becoming second largest LNG importer. China became the top global LNG importer in 2021 overtaking Japan as the leader in the consumption of liquefied gas, followed by South Korea, and India.

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Asia Pacific will account for the highest share of global imports by 2050, while the share held by the European market will be gradually decreasing as import volumes increase slowly by 2030 due to a significant drop in domestic production but will later slow down till 2050. The overall natural gas demand in Europe is starting to decrease as decarbonisation and the "green deal" efforts are seen to move gas out of energy mix.

Slow LNG demand is seen in Africa, the Caribbean and partially in the Middle East. A very few import terminal projects are currently being built there.

Pipeline trade will see relatively modest growth, mainly due to shifting the export focus from the European to the Asian market, ramping up exports from Russia and Turkmenistan to China.

According to the GECF, a rapid shift in demand for LNG from traditional markets to emerging markets will be envisaged in the coming 30 years. The Asian natural gas market is anticipated to stay the largest regional market over the 2020-2050 period, as more countries start importing natural gas with existing importers from predominantly developing Asia ramp-up the existing inflow trade.

The incremental growth in Asian imports will be attributed to China (195bcm) and India (107bcm), 14bcm by South Korea, with the balance taken by new importers from South and Southeast Asia and other developing Asia. Legacy importers such as Japan and Taiwan will slowly decrease gas imports.

The share of global demand met by the traditional markets – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan – will drop from 39% in 2020 to 18% by 2040, mainly due to lower gas demand for power generation in Japan, the GECF said.

Europe risks rationing if Putin cuts off Russian gas supply

The prospect of Europe getting cut off from Russian gas supplies is starting to get real.

The clock is ticking in a standoff over the Kremlin's demand that its customers in Europe pay in rubles for the fuel, which the region depends on for a fifth of its power generation.

The European Union has said the decree violates sanctions and hands more power to Russia. It suggested an alternative that avoids rubles on Friday, but it's up to Moscow to decide if that's acceptable. Payments come due in May, and that's when the moment of truth arrives.

By refusing President Vladimir Putin's payment terms and testing his threat to turn off the taps, European buyers "would be running a very real risk of their supplies being cut," said Katja Yafimava, a senior research fellow at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

The game of geopolitical chicken could lead to Europe rationing energy for the first time since the oil crisis in the 1970s. As the biggest consumer of Russian gas in Europe, Germany is most exposed, but the fallout would ripple across the continent and beyond. Here's what could happen:

Market meltdown

Europe’s natural gas market would show the impact immediately. Trading is already on edge, with prices five times higher than the same time last year. That could get worse.

In the event of a supply disruption, forward contracts could more than triple, especially if Europe enters next winter with depleted storage, according to Kaushal Ramesh, senior analyst, gas and LNG at Rystad Energy.

Such a surge would put governments and central banks under pressure as they seek to control soaring inflation. The risk is that the mounting cost-of-living crisis intensifies and spills over into wider unrest and a deeper crisis.

Power shift

With less fuel for gas-fired generators, the risks of rolling blackouts would increase. While countries would try to shift to other sources, the options are limited.

France would halt large gas-fired power plants to conserve the fuel for other needs, Italy would maximize production from coal or fuel oil, and Germany has discussed burning more local lignite – the dirtiest form of coal. The workarounds are likely to make the region even more polluting.

On the upside, warmer weather would reduce gas consumption for heating, delaying the worst impacts at least until the fall.

By ramping up other energy sources, including an accelerated expansion of renewable power, the EU aims to cut its gas dependency on Russia by two thirds this year.

German rationing

Germany has triggered an emergency plan, with a task force meeting daily to monitor consumption and inventories. Its energy regulator is surveying companies about their usage to help determine how to distribute supplies.

Consumers would be protected as long as possible, and that

means industry would bear the brunt of a rationing plan. That’s a big risk for Europe’s largest economy. The country depends on Russia for 40% of its gas supplies, and the fuel is critical for processes in the chemicals and metals industries.

At Europe’s biggest chemical factory, BASF SE churns out compounds used in manufacturing autos, medicines and fertilizers and all fueled by pipelines filled with Russian gas. The company warns that a sudden halt would send shock waves through many industries and cause irreversible damage to German competitiveness.

The concerns are echoed by the likes of steelmaker Thyssenkrupp AG, automaker Volkswagen AG and utility RWE AG.

“Stopping the pipeline-bound gas supply at this time would have dramatic consequences,” RWE Chief Executive Officer Markus Krebber said in an advanced copy of a speech for the company’s shareholder meeting next week. Many manufacturers “would no longer be able to operate their plants.”

Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said a halt to gas flows from Russia would trigger a serious economic crisis in Europe, leading to the loss of millions of jobs.

The sudden halt in Russian gas deliveries could cost Germany’s economy 220 billion euros, or about 6.5% of annual gross domestic product, according to a joint forecast of the country’s leading economic institutes. The Bundesbank estimates that output could shrink nearly 2% this year in the event of an embargo on Russian coal, oil and gas.

Read more: Germany to Borrow Extra 40 Billion Euros to Cushion War Blow

But the Berlin-based DIW think tank says a combination of energy savings and optimizing alternative supplies could put Germany in position to offset Russian gas as soon as this winter.

The government has expanded its authority over the energy sector with new rules on gas storage. It’s also planning to grant itself powers to put critical energy infrastructure under temporary state control.

Global squeeze

Emerging nations would get squeezed by Europe’s thirst for energy, especially liquefied natural gas, as they would struggle to compete on price. The region is already pulling most of the spare LNG supply from the U.S. and other nearby exporters, keeping spot rates for the super-chilled fuel well above normal for this time of year.

Pakistan is suffering from blackouts, due in part to European nations outbidding the cash-strapped country for LNG cargoes. Argentina is also dependent on LNG from the spot market and has been forced to fork over hundreds of millions of dollars to secure deliveries for the southern hemisphere’s upcoming winter.

Double bluff

As in any game of chicken, there’s the chance for one side or both to pull away from the brink. While Europe needs the gas, the continent remains the only potential market in the near term for production from Russian fields.

Turning off the tap now may permanently close the door on Russian energy imports to its neighbor, choking off a key source of revenue in the process. Germany, which has been criticized for cautious support of Ukraine, would face renewed pressure to stand up to Putin more forcefully.

U.S. Natural Gas Surges to 13-Year High on Global Supply Crunch

As a result of strong demand, U.S. natural gasoline prices soared to their highest intraday levels in more than 13 years.

- Despite a drop in backup inventories, production is still flat
- Strong demand from Europe has almost pushed LNG exports to the limit

Futures rose to $7.558 per million British Thermal Units, surpassing January's -fueled the rally. This was roughly twice the level at the beginning of the year.

As suppliers struggle to keep up with a surge in demand after a pandemic, a global fuel shortage is emerging across the markets. This situation is further complicated by the conflict

in Ukraine. This discount is shrinking, even though U.S. natural gasoline prices have been well below those in Europe and Asia over the past year due to a bounty from shale fields.

The underground caverns and the aquifers holding backup inventories are lower than normal, and production is flat. To help Europe reduce its dependence on Russian energy, the U.S. is currently exporting every molecule possible of liquefied gas.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, temperatures below normal are expected in parts of the northern U.S.A. between April 25 and May 1. This could lead to an increase in demand for heating and power-plant fuels, which would divert supply from storage that is normally used during this time. The U.S.'s shortage of coal has also contributed to the rise in gas prices, which has limited power generators' ability to switch fuels.

According to the Energy Information Administration, inventories increased by 15 billion cubic yards in the week ending April 8, which was less than half of the average gain over the past five years. Stockpiles are still 18% lower than usual.

Russia April Gas Exports Fall On Spot Price Drop, Warmer Weather

(Bloomberg) – Gazprom PJSC’s average daily exports to key foreign buyers so far in April fell to lowest in three months, as warmer weather and lower spot prices started to lure European clients away from Russian gas. The gas giant exported an average of 407 million cubic meters a day to countries outside the former Soviet Union in the first 15 days of April, according to Bloomberg calculations b

The gas giant exported an average of 407 million cubic meters a day to countries outside the former Soviet Union in the first 15 days of April, according to Bloomberg calculations based on a Gazprom statement published Friday. That’s nearly 18% below the daily average for the month of March. The company’s year-to-date exports to its key markets tumbled more than 26% compared to the same period of 2021 to 44.6 billion cubic meters, Gazprom said.

“Russian flows have been reduced and LNG imports strengthened in the last few days, as a result of the TTF day-ahead price falling, making spot volume prices more competitive compared to TTF-indexed Russian pipeline gas,” Rystad Energy analyst

Vinicius Romano said in a research note earlier this week.

The European Union depends on Russia for 40% of the gas it consumes, which makes it challenging for the alliance to stop the purchases immediately in retaliation for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. However, the bloc is trying taking steps to wean itself off Gazprom supplies, with EU governments starting to assess alternative supply sources.

Moscow's demand that so-called "unfriendly" countries pay for gas deliveries in rubles starting from April is creating additional pressure on its clients to find alternative supplies, as the Kremlin has threatened to cut off exports to buyers that refuse to comply.

Gazprom doesn't provide a detailed export breakdown by country, making it difficult to assess supplies to Turkey and most of Europe, the key market for the company's foreign deliveries. Russian daily flows toward the borders with European nations have averaged nearly 324 million cubic meters between April 1-12, compared with 361.5 million cubic meters per day in March, according to Gazprom data.

Gazprom said it continues to supply gas in line with requests from consumers and is in full compliance with its contractual obligations.

The EU Commission's plan to eventually have the continent's gas storages 90% full by the start of winter is "very ambitious," Gazprom said in the statement. That would imply reinjections of 63 billion cubic meters, which is higher than the volume of gas stored during the warmer months in recent years and still would not cover peak demand if winter is abnormally cold, according to the Russian company.

Gazprom's daily output between April 1-15 averaged 1.393 billion cubic meters, according to Bloomberg calculations. That's 4.3% below the average over the whole of April 2021. Since the start of the year, the producer pumped 155.9 billion

cubic meters of natural gas, down 1.3% year on year, according to Gazprom's data.

Russia's year-to-date domestic gas consumption declined 3.6% compared to the same period in 2021 amid warmer weather in February, Gazprom said.

– With assistance by Helen Robertson

Morocco considers onshore, offshore options for LNG import facility

RABAT, April 15 (Reuters) – Morocco is studying options at several ports to build a floating or land-based facility to import liquefied natural gas (LNG), Energy Minister Leila Benali said on Friday.

Morocco relied for much of its gas needs – about 1 billion cubic metres (bcm) annually – on a pipeline that used to channel Algerian gas to Spain, until it was halted last October by Algiers, against the backdrop of worsening relations between the Maghreb's most populous countries.

Whether floating or onshore, studies are underway to choose the "most immediate solution", Benali told reporters.

The country tendered in January for a study on the upgrade of Mohammedia port near Casablanca to host an LNG floating storage and regasification unit (FSRU).

Mohammedia and the Mediterranean port of Nador appear to be best equipped to host regasification terminals, she said.

"But we can prepare four ports at least," she said, citing Kenitra and Jorf Lasfar ports.

"It is important for Morocco's energy sovereignty to have regasification capacity on our territory and in our maritime space," she said.

Morocco will enter the international LNG market "in the upcoming days," making use of unused capacity at Spanish terminals, she said, without giving further details.

Though she said: "We are not importing Spanish or European LNG."

"Transit issues have been settled," she said.

In addition to Spain, Morocco discussed in November with Portugal and France about tapping into the under-used regasification capacity.

"They have regasification terminals that are under-used, and we have a pipeline that has to be used," Benali said.

The pipeline is key to feeding two small power plants that

supply Morocco’s northwest and northeast, which currently rely on the national grid.

Draghi is betting on Africa for Italy’s exit from Russian gas

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi is chasing a raft of natural gas deals in Africa as he seeks to cut energy ties with Russia.

Draghi will travel to central and southern Africa this week in pursuit of further supplies after Italy struck agreements for Algerian and Egyptian gas.

His tour may ruffle some feathers as European partners vie to displace Russian energy following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

Potential deals in the Republic of Congo and Angola could

bring Italy an additional 5bn cubic metres and 1.5bn cubic metres a year, respectively, people familiar with the matter said, asking not to be identified discussing private information.

Together with the extra volume it secured from Algeria, which would replace more than half the amount it gets from Russia as early as next year.

Talks are ongoing and details of any accords may change, the people said.

Italy currently gets about 40% of its gas from Russia, and Draghi — together with local energy giant Eni SpA — has sought alternative sources since President Vladimir Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine in February.

With Eni already present in more than a dozen countries in Africa, the continent is an attractive option. Yet the former central banker's energy diplomacy is causing some anxiety among European Union allies.

The Algeria deal stoked concerns in Spain that its own access to the country's gas could be affected, prompting talks between Rome and Madrid.

It's also unclear how Italy's plans square with a push to centralize gas-purchase negotiations at the EU level.

"It's really important that the EU sticks together at the moment, that's essential," said Oliver Sartor, senior industry adviser at think tank Agora Energiewende. "There are some countries that are more exposed than others, so it's normal that they would look to protect themselves. But there's a higher priority here."

Draghi's discussions in Congo and Angola this week will focus — among other things — on boosting deliveries of liquefied natural gas, the people said.

That trip could be followed by travel to Mozambique, though plans haven't yet been confirmed, they said.

Gas discoveries off Mozambique have attracted international operators, including Eni, to its waters.

While work in the country is risky — with attacks by an insurgency group threatening onshore developments — Eni's

Coral Sul offshore LNG plant is expected to start production in the second half of 2022.

The company’s deal with Algeria’s Sonatrach Group, signed during Draghi’s first official visit to Algiers, sees Italy buying an extra 9bn cubic metres of gas annually by 2023-2024.

On Wednesday, the firm struck an agreement with Egypt to increase flows of LNG to Italy. It has also said it’s ready to invest billions of euros across the Mediterranean Sea in Libya, where it has been present for decades.

Draghi isn’t the only EU leader to court gas-rich countries in a bid to ease dependence on Moscow.

Germany, which relies on Russia for 40% of its gas imports, is creating its own LNG infrastructure.

Others from France to Croatia plan to build or expand import terminals, while the US has also agreed to boost shipments to the bloc.

“Everyone is moving very fast,” said Simone Tagliapietra, a senior fellow at the Bruegel think tank in Brussels. “It makes sense for Draghi to act now, and he is doing it very well.”