

Southern Mediterranean offers 'hope' for European energy supply

Parliament has hosted the second Euro-Mediterranean rendez-vous on energy amid rising energy supply security concerns.

Gilles Pargneaux, a member of parliament's delegation to the parliamentary assembly of the union for the Mediterranean, said the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the UN climate change conference taking place in Paris at the end of the year "are forcing us to rethink the question of energy in Europe".

Speaking after a conference on strengthening energy ties between Europe and the countries bordering the Mediterranean, the French deputy highlighted that "53 per cent of our energy comes from third countries and six member states depend entirely on Russian gas imports".

Yet he added, "if there are concerns linked to the east, there is hope linked to the South".

There are currently five projects in the pipeline to share gas and electricity supplies between southern Europe and northern Africa, with interconnections being established to link Sicily, Italy and Spain to Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.

"If there are concerns linked to the east, there is hope linked to the South" – Gilles Pargneaux

André Merlin, CEO of Medgrid – a consortium of companies which aims to develop such interconnections – said "an essential component of the energy union is to create links between Europe and southern Mediterranean countries".

He explained that "the main interest is to export conventional

electricity from Europe to the south and renewables from the south to Europe”.

Each project will cost between €300m and €900m and is expected to become profitable by 2020.

They have yet to be included in the commission’s list of projects of common interest, but Merlin said he was still holding out hope for EU funding.

Jerzy Buzek, chair of parliament’s industry, research and energy committee recently told the Parliament Magazine how crucial the energy union is for Europe, explaining that job creation and growth will come about “only if we are able to provide secure, affordable and sustainable energy”.

The key, he said, is “a true energy community for Europe founded on a common energy market, common energy-oriented research and a common voice for the EU in relations with our external suppliers”.

The MEP described Maroš Šefčovič, commission vice president in charge of the energy union, as “the institutional product of this overarching importance placed on energy policy”. Prior to Šefčovič’s nomination, there was no EU official in charge of the energy union.

Buzek added that this role is vital “not only for the prosperity of our citizens, but for the wellbeing of the EU at large”.

The former parliament president stressed that “a truly interconnected market is the key to more affordable energy, not only for businesses, but also for citizens” and that it could be “an excellent exit strategy from the economic crisis”.