

Draft Minutes of SSDC Gas – 26 September 2022

The meeting was chaired by Matthew Russel Lay (EPSU).

The agenda and minutes of the 2nd Working Group SSDC Gas of 7th June 2022 were adopted.

Victor Bernabeu (Eurogas) delivered some **updates on energy policy** starting from the Russian gas supplies: at least 12 EU Member States were already suffering from full or partial disruption. The supply lines from Global LNG increased from Algeria, Azerbaijan, and Norway. TTF rose above 225 euro/MWh, producing a structural uncertainty. The European gas crunch is driving a greater commodity crisis and going well beyond Europe, hitting fertilizers and chemicals. The status of storage in the EU on 15 September was by 85%. Still, there is a discrepancy, with South-Eastern States in the 70-80% range. The EU policy mandates to store gas by at least 80% before winter 2022-23, 90% for the following winter periods. Mr Bernabeu reported on the new Council regulation for a coordinated demanded reduction measures for gas, “Safe Gas for a Safe Winter”, and the European Gas Demand Reduction Plan, encouraging priority for renewables and cleaner fuels, promoting saving of non-critical gas for electricity and heat production, incentivising reduction in industry. He considered to be discussed: measures concerning the electricity market, demanding reduction of gross electricity consumption with a voluntary approach, and reduction of gross electricity consumption during peak price hours with a mandatory 5%.

Jakob Embacher (EPSU) expressed concern about energy poverty and households. Judith Kirton-Darling (IndustriAll) pointed out the importance of a radical reform of the market and of the impact on workers. Mr Bernabeu replied with the major concerns on industry closures. About the price cap, he considered that the EU market should be maintained attractive. James Watson (Eurogas) supported the fair balance between helping consumers in the frame of an emergency and energy poverty, and free distribution, providing energy to industries. He expressed support for RePowerEU.

Fabien Courderc (SYNDEX) provided a contribution on the **joint project on “The Gas Sector in the Context of the European Energy Transition”**. His draft report is structured in an overlook of the situation of the sector starting from the geopolitical challenges and the European demand according to OECD data, a set of good practices (at the EU, national, company level) and available tools for the transition, and in a methodology up to provide recommendations. His intervention pointed out the importance of job mapping in the sector, for having good skills to face the green transition and the optimisation of energy consumption. The attention on skills should face the lack of attractiveness of technical jobs occupations. Among the good practices (e.g.: ENGIE, ENEL, the agreement between Naturgy, the trade unions and the Spanish government, or the Spanish national strategy on global decarbonisation), he emphasised the importance of qualification, training, health, safety and wellbeing of workers. Social Dialogue is a basic tool for the success of a fair and just transition, especially for communities affected by declining local industries or historically known as developing economies. Strengthening social dialogue at every level, and guaranteeing the effectiveness of collective agreements will be part of the final recommendations.

Mr Embacher, Ms Kirton-Darling, Sophie Grenade (IndustriAll) and Bronagh O’Hagan (Eurogas) exchanged their views on the roadmap concerning the project.

About the **Work Programme**, Ms Grenade presented the main axis of the joint proposal: (1) *Fit for 55 gas sector: a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities* ahead (1a) the EU policy framework on energy policies, energy prices, energy supply and (1b) and outlook for natural gas, renewable and decarbonised gases 2030-50; (2) *Just transition in the gas sector: anticipating the changes needed in the workforce* through (2a) expected job and skills related dynamics and new business models and (2b) the anticipation of changes through mitigation policies on employment and skills. Among the activities foreseen: exchange of views with the Commission, experts and key stakeholders, joint positions from Social Partners, especially on energy transition and the role of women. She pointed out the crucial importance of a sectoral binding agreement fully devoted to the just transition. Ms O’Hagan recalled the gender justice and Mr Watson the need of flexibility in addressing topics and measures having an impact in the crisis, starting from the electricity market reform. Ettore Bucci (EC)

recalled the frame of the European Year of Skills as indicated by President Von Der Leyen. The WP draft was adopted by the Plenary.

Diana Crumpana (EC) briefly presented the type of support that the Commission could provide in relation to a possible **social partners agreement in the SSDC Gas**. She explained the different types of Social Partners Agreements (SPAs): SPAs with autonomous implementation and SPAs that can become EU law, as well as how the Commission could provide financial, technical and logistical support for the negotiation of an agreement. She emphasized the autonomy of the Social Partners, the procedure for having support and recalled that a new frame of support will be part of the overall Social Dialogue Initiative. She also underlined the need to respect the Treaty provisions, the consistency with the existent EU law and the need to ensure the representativeness of the organisations.

Experiences from employers and unions with past agreements were provided by Jan Willem Goudriaan (EPSU) and Sylvain Lefebvre (IndustriAll Europe). EPSU presented the 2022 agreement on digitalization for central and federal government as a success story, and the 2015 agreement on Central Government Administration as an example where the implementation through a Council Directive was denied. IndustriAll Europe spoke about the NEPSI agreement which is a success story of negotiating an autonomous agreement in the field of health and safety and further supporting its implementation with grants from the EU. Then, Ms O'Hagan pointed out the specific importance of skills and gender equality in the sector, and the sense of urgency for collective agreements, starting from the results of the project ending in January 2023. Ms Crumpana highlighted that the Commission can support the social partners to implement autonomous SPAs which will also be included in the next framework, and that the content of the initiative and the specific measures it will include remain to be seen at the moment of its publication.

The discussion **towards an agreement in the SSDC Gas** was a brainstorm on the possible contents of the SPAs. Mr Embacher presented a list of points that should be addressed: (a) access to training for supporting fair and just transition, (b) diversity and inclusion – with a special mention for the gender equality issue. He recalled the ENGIE Global Agreement, the ENGIE European Labour Relations Agreement, and the Cercas Report on Information and consultation of workers. Considering the topics covered by art. 153 TFEU, he noted: (b) working conditions, (d) protection, (e) information and consultation, (f) representation and collective defence of interest of workers, (i) equality between men and women. He also noted that the SPA could launch a Just Transition Observatory as an overarching monitoring structure at the EU level.

Ms Grenade informed that this is a proposal starting from the in-progress work of secretariats for setting up a negotiation mandate with presumable starting date early 2023, following the final conference of the project on employment in the gas sector in January. The negotiations should last for 9 months. Ms O'Hagan added a specific note on the possible application for connected energies, and on the maritime. The workers' and employers' national representatives replied considering that they wanted to be more prepared, studying the implication of Art. 153 and this list of possible subjects. The Chair concluded with the importance of having more time for digesting the conversation in the national memberships in the next few months, as a basis for moving forward.

In AOB, Mr Bucci recalled the call for evidence [Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-room/default.aspx?id=14527), and the upcoming Liaison Forum meeting on the 19th of October.

The Chair closed the meeting.