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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	REPowerEU Communication: quo vadis? = Exchange of views

In view of the Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council on 30 May 2024, delegations will find in the Annex the Presidency discussion paper on the above subject.

Following Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine, on 10 and 11 March 2022, EU Heads of State and Government adopted a declaration in Versailles¹ setting the following objective: 'to phase out the EU's dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports as soon as possible'. In the context of an unprecedented energy crisis in the EU that would, in the following months, dramatically impinge on the EU's energy security and trigger sharp rises in energy prices across the continent, EU leaders invited the Commission to propose a REPowerEU plan to, notably, a) accelerate the reduction of the EU's overall reliance on fossil fuels, taking into account national circumstances and Member States' choices of their energy mix; b) diversify our supplies and routes; c) further develop a hydrogen market for Europe; d) speed up the development of renewables and speed up authorisation procedures to accelerate energy projects; e) complete and improve European gas and electricity interconnections; f) reinforce EU contingency planning for security of supply and g) improve energy efficiency. EU leaders also indicated the need to intensify work with a view to a) ensuring sufficient levels of gas storage, b) monitoring and optimising the functioning of the electricity market; c) channelling coordinated investment in energy systems and d) enhancing connectivity with the EU's immediate neighbourhood.

In May 2022, the Commission adopted the REPowerEU plan², with three headline objectives: i) save energy; ii) produce renewable energy and iii) diversify the EU's energy supplies. The ultimate goal of the Commission's plan is to phase out dependency on Russian fossil fuel imports by 2027 at the latest³. The REPowerEU plan, built on the European Green Deal, together with the Council's emergency regulations were Europe's key tools to diversify away from imports of Russian energy, and therefore provided a way out of the crisis. In this vein, the REPowerEU plan developed short-term measures to reduce energy consumption, set out a strong long-term framework to increase energy efficiency towards 2030, and accelerated the production of renewable energy with a view to enhancing the EU's energy security and decarbonising the EU's economy. Apart from the structural measures put forward in the context of REPowerEU, a number of temporary and exceptional emergency regulations were also adopted.

¹ [20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A230%3AFIN)

² COM(2022) 230 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2022%3A230%3AFIN>

³ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b27b8b93-725d-11ee-9220-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

Following the REPowerEU plan, most Member States significantly reduced or phased out imports of Russian gas, oil and coal, while some also phased out dependency on nuclear fuel or electricity from Russia. In total, European consumers have managed to save 125.2 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas, with natural gas demand declining by more than 18% over the period from August 2022 to March 2024. Over the past two years, the EU also managed to ensure that gas storage facilities were filled to sufficient levels for citizens and industry and to avoid blackouts and power shortages. To compensate for the significant drop in Russian gas imports (that decreased from 45% of overall EU gas imports in 2021 to 24% in 2022 and to 15% in 2023), the EU expanded its gas supply from other international suppliers, mainly Norway and the US. The EU Energy Platform, launched by the European Commission in December 2022, played a role in the EU's joint diversification efforts. The demand aggregation mechanism established under the EU Energy Platform in April 2023 contributed to filling gas storage ahead of the 2023-2024 winter season. REPowerEU also led to an acceleration of the deployment of renewables projects and energy efficiency efforts. Industry estimates⁴ indicate that installed wind and solar capacity increased by 36% cumulatively between 2021 and 2023, saving approximately 24 bcm of gas over two years. In terms of energy efficiency, final energy consumption decreased to 940 Mtoe in 2022, corresponding to a 2.8% reduction compared with 2021. Further initiatives such as the EU Action Plan for Grids⁵, the EU Wind Power Action Plan⁶, the EU Solar Energy Strategy⁷, new measures on permitting, the Wind and Solar Charters and the establishment of the European Energy Efficiency Financing Coalition are supporting the swift delivery of the European Green Deal's objectives, acting as crucial enablers of the clean energy transition. To finance the necessary investments, close to €300 billion has been mobilised for the implementation of the REPowerEU plan, mostly via the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation⁸.

⁴ Sources: Eurostat, WindEurope, Solar Power Europe

⁵ COM(2023)757

⁶ COM(2023)669

⁷ COM(2022)221

⁸ Regulation (EU) 2021/241

As **REPowerEU marks its two-year anniversary**, the Commission has recently published a web-based report taking stock of REPowerEU's implementation, including country-specific factsheets, and has issued additional concrete guidance, notably aimed at further accelerating the deployment of renewables across the continent and reducing Russian fossil fuel imports. In particular, the Commission has adopted a series of new and updated recommendations and guidance documents to improve and streamline permitting procedures and auctions for renewables.

Two years since the adoption of REPowerEU, it has become clear that, while EU imports of Russian fuels have drastically reduced, the EU has succeeded in preserving its energy security. Building on the lessons learned from the energy crisis, and taking into account the negative and at times disruptive effects the energy crisis has had on European citizens and industries, further efforts will be needed in the years ahead to increase the EU's and Member States' resilience to the weaponisation of energy by foreign regimes, preserving and strengthening energy security and stabilising prices. Furthermore, reducing Europe's structural dependence on Russian energy imports will substantially hit Russia's war economy and align with the EU's unwavering support for Ukraine and its citizens.

Against this background, the Belgian Presidency would like to ask Delegations for their views on the following two aspects:

- 1. Which obstacles are you encountering in phasing out Russian energy imports, in line with the spirit of the Versailles Declaration and subsequent REPowerEU plan?**
 - 2. What additional initiatives should be launched to support the EU and its Member States in our efforts to phase out dependency on Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible?**
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