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# The EU Energy Security: Challenges and Opportunities

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## Introduction

Europe is experiencing an unprecedented energy crisis since Russia's invasion of Ukraine started. This is highlighting the challenges that the continent is facing, especially concerning energy. This is one of the reasons why energy security plays a central role in the common security plans of the EU and NATO allies.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has produced a drastic increase in gas and electricity prices, leading EU member states to worry about the consequences of the issue. This contextual situation can be seen as an ideal opportunity for the governments of member states to act in order to improve energy security in the continent at the same time as they reduce harmful CO2 emissions through a complete energy transition.

## Status Quo: The EU Energy Security Policy

Energy has always been a relevant geopolitical issue for the EU. In 2014, the EU launched the European "Energy Security Strategy" in response to member states' concerns about EU energy dependence, especially on Russian supply. This strategy comprises measures to secure energy supplies including the common purchase of pipeline gas for the Union as well as hydrogen and liquefied natural gas (LNG). In addition, the EU legislation on gas storage helps to prevent potential gas supply disruptions and produce local and accessible energy (EUR-Lex, 2014).

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, energy prices have skyrocketed. Supply and demand issues have caused prices to multiply by even ten compared to the previous year (Borrell, 2022), something affecting member states and their population directly. However, this is not solely a price issue but a matter of security of supplies. For this reason, in March 2022, EU leaders at the European Council agreed to reduce Europe's dependency on Russian energy and gas exports as soon as possible (European Commission, 2022). After this agreement, there has been an evolution in the energy and environmental policies. Due to the ongoing succession of events, countries committed to reducing gas demand by 15% next winter on the 26 of July, with the Council adopting that regulation on the 5 of August. Later, on 9 September 2022, Ministers discussed options to mitigate the effects of the energy prices and review the progress made on winter preparedness.

Together with these proposals, other measures to face this energetical challenge have been considered. For instance, countries such as Spain, Germany or Portugal believe that the MidCat pipeline is necessary and should be a priority for the continent to reduce dependence on Russian gas, encouraging relations with other partners and fostering mutual cooperation among member states (Messad, 2022). However, France is rejecting the proposal, making the goal of energy independence possible on paper but not directly translated into practice.

**The REPowerEU Plan**

On another note, the EU has created the REPowerEU Plan, which advocates for saving energy, accelerating energy transition, diversifying gas supplies, combining investments and reforms and reducing the continent's dependence on fossil fuels from Russia as soon as possible. In addition, it fosters the green transition in the EU (European Commission, 2022a), committing to the European Green Deal, and provides a precedent for improving energy security. For this to be advanced, leadership and political coordination are necessary, as well as the emergence of technological elements that allow these changes. It is essential to join forces to achieve a better-suited and more resilient energy system and an Energy Union through the strengthening of the energy market (European Commission, 2022a).

The REPowerEU is built on the complete implementation of the Fit for 55 package –a set of proposals in order to align current laws with the set-out ambitions for 2030 and 2050 in terms of climate, energy and transport (European Council, 2022). The Plan does not modify the ambition of achieving at least -55% net Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) emissions by 2030 and complete climate neutrality by 2050. It is important to remark that the REPowerEU cannot function without a proper and fast implementation of all Fit for 55 proposals and more ambitious targets for renewable energies and energy efficiency.

The plan focuses on four main pillars or goals that affect directly energy security and that can be summarized in this way (European Commission, 2022b):

*Energy savings.* Reducing energy consumption lowers households' and companies' high energy bills in the short and long term at the same time as it reduces Russian fossil fuel imports, ensuring greater energy stability and security in the continent.

*Diversifying energy supplies.* The Commission and the member states have created an EU Energy Platform for the voluntary common purchasing mechanism of gas, hydrogen and LNG in order to foster joint coordination and cooperation. The goal is to work and talk with reliable partners, such as Norway or Algeria, avoiding geopolitical and military clashes with Russia. Currently, the US is already Europe's biggest LNG supplier (Borrell, 2022).

*Replacing fossil fuels towards Europe's clean energy transition.* Boosting renewable energy in power generation, industry, buildings and transport will accelerate the independence from Russian fossil fuel imports. Especially fostering wind and solar power, as well as accelerating hydrogen to replace natural gas, coal and oil. Also reducing fossil fuel consumption in the industrial, military and transport sectors, although hard, is necessary to achieve energy efficiency in the continent.

*Smart investing.* Investment in REPowerEU and the aims of Fit for 55 proposals will pay off and benefit member states, saving gas import expenditures in the long term.

As emphasized also during the State of the Union, energy security comes from a single market of energy and investment in domestic renewables. By reducing the gas supply coming from Russia, the EU will be investing in the green transition, further advancing the European Green Deal, as well as reducing the dependency on imports and becoming more strategically independent (Borell, 2022). This, in return, benefits the geopolitical position of the EU in the international arena.

**The Relevance of Energy Security to the Military**

It is clear that energy is a transversal issue, and this can be reflected in the national defence budgets. Establishing a joint climate and energy strategy for the defence and crisis management community can help overcome the challenges that Europe faces (EDA, 2013), not only politically but also militarily, while providing opportunities to advance. It can establish a base for how to tackle energy from a defence perspective, help shape policy in order to contribute to sustainable development and mitigate the risks to international security and also increase collaboration among member states and, consequently, their military forces.

Energy security lies at the centre not solely in geopolitical terms, but also for the military and defence issues of countries. In fact, energy matters to the military and a sustainable transition that has already started can offer advantages to the military forces, especially in these times of climate, energy and economic crises. The main benefits of ensuring energy security in Europe for the military and defence sector can be summarized as follows (EDA, 2016):

- Operational advantage. Military forces require energy for training, moving and sustaining weapon platforms for military interventions. If military equipment requires huge quantities of energy, it is more expensive and more complex to move and use them where they are needed. Ensuring the proper supply of energy as well as energy transition can benefit the military and the use of the machinery in operations, fostering efficiency of interventions and reduction of waste of energy resources.

- Sustainability and fight against climate change. Energy efficiency is essential to improving military capabilities and interventions at the same time as building a greener military. Reducing environmental damages diminishes the risk of land degradation, water scarcity or desertification, all which can exacerbate conflicts and also affect the deployment of troops in several locations. Moreover, to improve security and reduce expenditures, the military fossil fuel dependent footprint should be reduced.

- Saving costs. As the EU is dependent on foreign fossil fuels, it is important to increase energy efficiency and foster energy security in order to reduce costs. Vehicles and aircraft consuming less fossil fuels and the possibility to use renewable energies as a source to operate military machinery can save money. Financial capabilities saved on energy expenditure can be used for other military tasks, for example to buy weapons or improve military infrastructures and armies.

- Political power. Member states can also benefit on the political level if they can count on energy savings achieved in the defence sector. Although the military sector is not subjected to CO2 emission reduction obligations, it can create a powerful incentive for voluntary action and strengthen the opinion of the military among society.

**Conclusion**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has accelerated the rise of gas prices and has compromised imports of fossil fuels to the EU. This concerns the energy security of the continent and highlights the need for a strategic approach towards energy policies.

Creating a more sustainable EU is essential for achieving energy security in the continent. Thus, the development of renewable sources of energy can reduce foreign energy dependence, limiting the consequences that disruptions in energy supplies can have on military operations. Moreover, fostering more energy efficiency and innovative energy solutions can help the military to become more sustainable while maintaining the effectiveness necessary for operations.

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