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Viewpoint

European Union and the formation of its initiative in energy minerals

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ABSTRACT

In November 2008, the European Union adopted “The raw materials initiative – meeting our critical needs for growth and jobs in Europe”, dealing especially with ensuring the future needs of metallic and non-metallic raw materials for EU member state economies. After years of hesitation, this may undoubtedly be considered a very progressive step. The article lists the most relevant reasons why the EU should promptly proceed to the discussion and preparation of a similar material of higher legal force for energy minerals. Basic problem areas of forming a political platform for the preparation of the EU energy initiative include the exploitation of domestic energy raw material deposits, raw materials diplomacy, and the matter of renewable sources.

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1. Introduction

The prediction of the future consumption of energy presumes its sustained global growth (e.g. [du Can and Price, 2008](#); [Krewitt et al., 2009](#); [IEA, 2009](#)). Although the highest increase in energy consumption is expected in fast-growing economies and third-world countries (e.g. [Yan and Crookes, 2007](#)), this development will have a significant impact also on EU member states. The energy consumption growth will represent one of the causes of widening the gap between demand for and supply of energy minerals (as a synonym of mineral fuels according to [Weber et al. \(2010\)](#)) on raw material markets (e.g. [Giljum et al., 2008](#)), which will very probably mean that access to energy minerals will become an instrument of political pressure, more significant and effective than it is today.

Most EU member states belong to the group of energy minerals importing countries. The raw material bases of these countries have low reserve levels in the fuel-energy minerals sector and their production is mostly negligible. The portfolios of fuel-energy deposits are in most countries incomplete (one, two or even three deposits of the four most important energy minerals – coal, oil, natural gas and uranium – are lacking). And it is not important whether this incompleteness is caused by the geological aspects of the evolution of a particular country area or by the exhaustion of formerly rich deposits. In this situation, the long-term provision of energy minerals is of cardinal importance not only for these countries but also for the economic, and to a great extent, political future of the EU.

In this situation the European Union should view a rational and functional energy policy as a key factor not only in further growth but also in mere preservation of competitive industry and maintenance of living standard of the citizens of member states. That is why it would be suitable to evaluate the present situation of the EU energy strategy and to outline a political platform for a common procedure of EU member states concerning energy minerals.

2. Energy initiative as a common interest of EU member states

As already mentioned, the energy dependency of the EU as a whole has reached such values ([Fig. 1](#)) that it is no longer a technical issue, but has also started to become a political problem. The development in the last decade clearly shows basically the permanent growth of EU energy dependency, while the energy dependency of the old member states (EU15) is approx. 3% higher than that of the EU27. Therefore, the magic limit of 50% of energy import dependency was exceeded by the EU15 in 2001, and by the EU27 in 2004.

A similar picture provides the energy dependency of individual member states ([Fig. 2](#), as of 2008). With the atypical exception of Denmark, all other member states exhibit variously high percentage dependency on energy imports (from the lowest in case of the Estonia, 23.8%, to 100% dependency in case of Malta). However, highly dependant on energy imports are also the big economies of Germany (60.9%) and France (51.2%), which together with the economies of other member states have a crucial influence on the total values of the EU import dependency concerning energy.

This situation was a reason for the elaboration of many communications (e.g. [COM, 2007, 1](#); [COM, 2008a,b, 781](#); [COM,](#)

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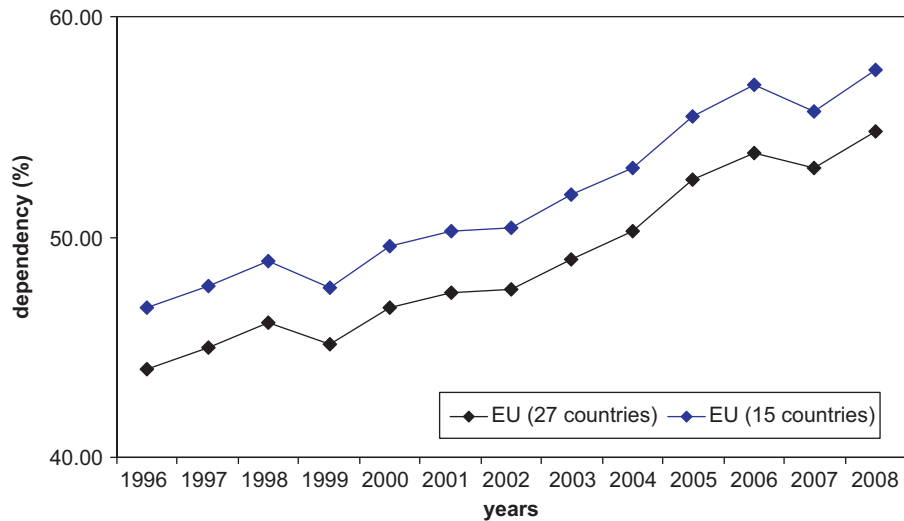


Fig. 1. EU energy dependency development, situation in 1996–2008. *Note:* value of EU15 for 2008 is estimated.
Source: Eurostat, 2010 and EC, 2006.

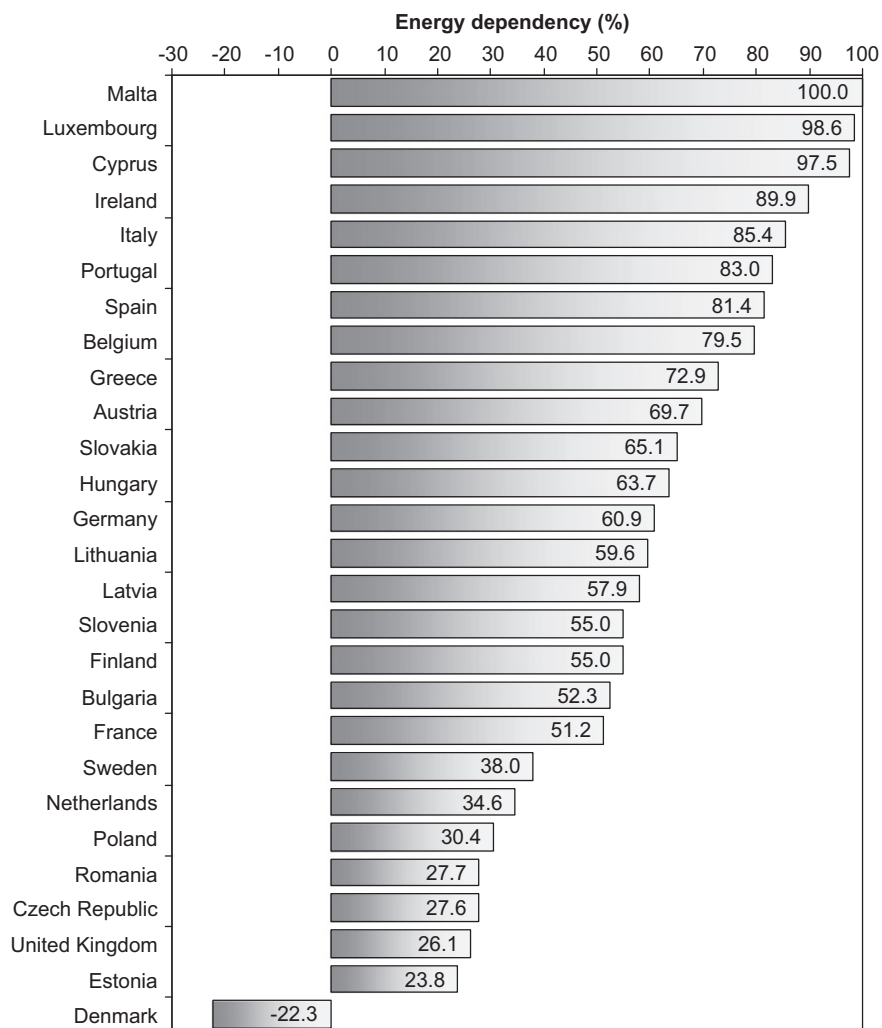


Fig. 2. EU member states energy dependency (*net imports divided by the sum of gross inland energy consumption plus bunkers*), situation in 2008.
Source: Eurostat, 2010.

2010, 639). The severity of the problems will, however, become so great that it will probably be necessary to adopt legal measures of higher legal force.

Under these circumstances it might be assumed that creating a common political platform for the EU energy initiative formulation, and strengthening energy security in general, should be

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