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SEVEN QUESTIONS TO CLAUDIA KEMFERT

»Europe Needs To Further Diversify Its Gas Imports«

1. Professor Kemfert, fears that the Ukrainian crisis could lead to a disruption in the supply of Russian natural gas to Europe are rising. How great do you consider this risk to be? Obviously, it's quite difficult to judge whether this could really happen. At the moment the possibility of supplies being curbed cannot be ruled out, as Putin's recent letter to European heads of state clearly demonstrates. We've already experienced the gas taps being turned off during the gas crises of 2006 and 2009. However, we are better prepared now than we were then, albeit in a variety of ways.
2. How can such temporary supply bottlenecks be eliminated? Europe has been preparing for such eventualities since 2009, primarily through increased diversification, i.e., by purchasing natural gas from alternative suppliers. Some European countries are building more liquefied natural gas terminals with a view to reducing their dependence on Russian gas. Additional pipelines have also been built in other gas-producing countries. This enables us to better overcome potential supply bottlenecks. We are, however, not quite where we'd like to be. A longer-term disruption to supply would still have a negative impact on a number of Eastern European countries, particularly because pipeline capacity is still underdeveloped and strategic gas reserves are not geared to deal with such developments.
3. What else needs to be done to secure gas supply? First, the pipeline system needs to be made more efficient. In particular, more opportunities need to be created for reverse flows of gas, from west to east, for example. In addition, storage capacity must be used more effectively and efficiently and, in the medium term, more must be done to save energy.
4. How dependent are we on Russian gas? The EU currently imports almost a quarter of its demand for natural gas from Russia, although individual European countries import widely differing quantities. In Germany, for example, this figure is around 38 percent but some Eastern European countries and also Finland actually import almost 100 percent of their gas requirements from Russia.
5. Russia has brokered a contract with China to supply significant amounts of gas. What does this mean for Europe? Just as Europe is diversifying, Russia too, is looking for more customers and partners. This is an entirely legitimate strategy that it has been pursuing for some time. The more important question is whether and which Asian pipelines will actually be built and what price China is willing to pay in the long term. This will not significantly affect the situation in Europe as Russia has sufficient gas available to supply various countries. Furthermore, Europe is also focusing on diversification and finding alternatives.
6. What role will natural gas play in the EU's long-term energy mix strategy? Gas will play a significant long-term role in the EU's energy mix, particularly because it acts as a bridging technology for the expansion of renewable energy sources. Natural gas power plants provide a flexible source of power which can be used in combination with renewable energy. In addition, natural gas continues to be important for the heating and industrial sectors and will play an increasingly significant role in future mobility.
7. How is natural gas consumption likely to develop in the EU? We can assume that gas consumption will stagnate. Although we will see a rise in consumption in some sectors, nonetheless, more and more energy will be saved due to improvements in energy efficiency. The field of building energy, in particular, will see an increase in energy savings in the future.

Interview by Erich Wittenberg.

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