

Measures to safeguard security of gas supply

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The Council held a policy debate on the proposed regulation, on the basis of a questionnaire prepared by the Presidency, and following a presentation by the Commissioner for Energy, Mr Piebalgs.

In principle, the general approach of the Commission's proposal was well received. Ministers highlighted, however, certain points of concern regarding specific aspects of the draft regulation.

Many ministers stressed, in particular, the need to clarify further the roles and responsibilities of the market actors, the Member States and the Commission, in line with the subsidiarity principle. For ensuring gas supply, the hierarchy going from gas undertakings, Member States, to the regional and the EU level was underlined. Crisis management should be based on an in-depth risk analysis, and there must be a balance between solidarity, the market's responsibilities and Member States' responsibility for their own gas supply.

A majority of ministers welcomed the Commission's proposal of mandatory infrastructure and supply standards, while asking for increased flexibility in order to take account of national circumstances and specificities. The implementation of the standards should be based on a cost-benefit analysis, with due priority given to market-based instruments. Regional and bilateral cooperation has been strongly supported in the debate, but more details will be needed, in particular regarding the breakdown of costs.

A clear-cut definition of protected customers was esteemed necessary, allowing nevertheless for sufficient flexibility to take national or regional circumstances into account, including financial issues. Several delegations also asked for this definition to be based on a cost-benefit analysis.

The incoming Spanish Presidency announced its intention of reaching a political agreement on the Commission's proposal before the end of June 2010.