



# EU ENLARGEMENT

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## THE ENERGY FOR IMPROVEMENTS - TO EVERYONE'S ENVIRONMENT

The enlargement countries differ in how they source their energy and in how they use it – but most of them have one thing in common. They are struggling towards meeting EU standards on energy and are only beginning to tackle the often closely-related issues of environment and climate change. Cleaner energy is just one aspect of the challenges they face, alongside EU standards that also range across air quality, drinking water, bathing water, waste management, or recycling.

It isn't easy for these countries. Coal remains one of the principal energy sources in the Western Balkans and Turkey. It is often the dirtiest form of coal, at that: lignite. The resulting air pollution is damaging health and shortening life expectancy in much of the region – and particularly in Kosovo\*, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which have some of the dirtiest coal-fired power plants. Turkey's economic boom over recent years has forced it to import much of its energy – largely in the form of fossil fuels – which has driven its CO<sup>2</sup> emissions to new heights.

Things are changing, but slowly. All the countries in the Western Balkans have signed up to cutting emissions from their energy production, in line with EU norms, by 2017, which means that dirty power stations will no longer be allowed to contaminate the atmosphere. And Turkey has embraced a strategic plan to make its energy supply more economically and environmentally sustainable over the next decade.

However, commitments are only part of the story. Their environment will continue to suffer and climate change targets will remain elusive as long as these countries continue to depend on older power stations that produce high emissions. Unfortunately, it is just not cost-effective to adapt many of these plants to

meet modern norms, and they will have to be shut down. But without adequate energy supplies, the economic recovery that these countries are also urgently seeking will be handicapped. Bridging the gap will be a tough challenge, since constructing replacement generation facilities or creating alternative energy supply channels inevitably takes years, and in most cases plans are still at an early stage – or even not yet in existence. Funding such plants is also difficult: the economic crisis has made many investors wary of projects of the necessary scale.

The EU is constantly supplying technical assistance and advice to governments in the region to help planning for bridging the energy gap and protecting the environment. It provides more tangible help too. Recently, for instance, a donors conference that the European Commission organised in Kosovo delivered promises of around EUR 100 million, mainly to close down the country's principal – and heavily polluting – power plant.

Prospects are gradually improving for supplies of gas, too. The recent decision on a pipeline from Azerbaijan should lead to direct links into Albania, and could spread across the Balkans as networks develop. This is an important development for a region that had no natural gas supplies.

There are also moves underway to ease energy availability for consumers. Energy prices in the region are often artificially low, due to the long legacy of state subsidies, but energy still represents a high charge for most people there, since average incomes are also low. EU encouragement to early implementation of measures to liberalise energy supply – in line with the EU's single market rules – is intended to open up the possibility of competition, bringing better service and lower prices to consumers.

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

In line with the broader goals of caring for the environment, the latest version of the EU's assistance programme also promotes a shift towards a more sustainable approach to energy production. One of the conditions is that a fifth of the funding made available must be devoted to climate-friendly actions, which will place more attention on renewable energy and energy efficiency. At the same time, adaptation to EU competition rules will bring state aid under closer scrutiny, helping to remedy inefficiencies.

The past history and the current tough economic circumstances have left the environment and climate change far from the top of the priorities of most of the enlargement countries. But here, too, things are slowly changing, and the EU encourages the process. Citizens in these countries will be the main beneficiaries when their governments take on EU rules governing environmental matters, whether it is new opportunities for participation, civil protection, creation of nature reserves, or action to prevent industrial accidents. For instance an EU-funded project known as ETNAR, is helping grass-roots groups to develop advocacy skills as they try to influence policy shifts to cut emissions, boost sustainable energy production, and be kinder to the environment across Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Turkey. Above all, meeting those EU standards will give citizens of the region what they deserve: the same stable energy and the same clean air as their counterparts in the rest of Europe.



One of the leaders of ETNAR is Toni Vidan, an energy campaigner at Zelena akcija / Friends of the Earth in Croatia, who has just become a full member of the European Economic and Social Committee with Croatia's accession in July. He says: "We share a vision of a prosperous Southeast Europe in which fossil and nuclear fuels, mostly imported, have been phased out before the mid-century mark, and replaced by locally owned and managed renewable energy sources, creating environmentally and socially sustainable energy and transport sectors. We call for 100% renewable, decentralized, locally produced and locally owned energy in our region by 2050 at the latest. We oppose investments in any coal-related projects – in terms of mining or power plants – and the development of energy projects in protected areas, future Natura 2000 areas, or other areas of high biodiversity value".