

Energy: rules for the internal market in natural gas. 'Gas Directive'

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The committee adopted the report by Claude TURMES (Greens/EFA, L) and Bernhard RAPKAY (PES, D) tabling a large number of mainly technical amendments to the Commission proposal under the codecision procedure (1st reading). It sought to amplify many of the definitions and clarify the text of the proposal. Some of the amendments were also aimed at ensuring that environmental protection, through the promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures, was taken sufficiently into account in the proposal. One amendment stipulated that the costs of connecting new producers of electricity from renewable energy sources should be "objective, transparent and non-discriminatory". Moreover, to enable consumers to make informed choices, Member States should ensure that electricity companies specified certain minimum information in their bills, such as the percentage mix of the different energy sources used to generate the electricity sold and the volume of greenhouse gases, nuclear waste and other pollutants produced during electricity production. The Commission was also asked to come up with proposals to regulate third-country access to the internal electricity and gas markets to avoid energy 'dumping'. Those proposals should specify that any importation of energy into the internal market should be subject to production and transmission standards similar to those in the EU, particularly as far as environmental and safety criteria were concerned. The report also stressed the importance of public service obligations and introduced a number of new provisions aimed at providing increased protection for consumers. It sought to ensure, for example, that price caps were not removed until the market was working effectively and that adequate safeguards were put in place to protect vulnerable consumers from disconnection. On the controversial issue of regulatory authorities, the committee wanted Member States to designate one or more competent bodies as regulatory authorities that would have the highest possible degree of independence from governments. Their responsibilities should include continuous monitoring of the market with a view to establishing a level playing field, supervising the unbundling of accounts, reporting on market concentrations and advising the appropriate national authorities. The committee also said that electricity companies should have the right to appeal to an independent tribunal against decisions by national regulatory authorities. Lastly, MEPs wanted to allow a longer period than that proposed by the Commission for the Member States to transpose the directive into national law.