



Big EU energy projects cannot be chosen behind closed doors, say NGOs

[Brussels, September 29, 2014] – As a new process of identifying big EU energy Projects of Common Interest (PCIs) kicks off in Brussels today, environmental NGOs warn that the EU must only prioritise energy projects which are not destructive of the environment and climate, and that the choice of these projects must be done through a transparent process.

In a development little known to the general public, DG Energy is today starting a new process of selecting EU priority energy projects during the so-called Second Cross-Regional Group Meeting 2014.

Once a project – electricity grid, gas terminal, pipeline and alike – is identified as a PCI, it receives preferential treatment. „Firstly, member states should treat such project as superior, make permit-granting as fast as possible – main proceedings in maximum 18 months,” explains Birgit Schmidhuber from NGO Justice & Environment. “Secondly, PCIs are eligible for funds from a special EU-fund as well as for financial ‘incentives’ from national governments.”

Such a project is also more likely to obtain support from European public facilities or bodies such as the Connecting Europe Facility, the European Investment Bank or institutions de facto controlled by EU Member States such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

In October last year, the European Commission presented a first list of its preferred energy projects for prioritisation, which was drafted behind closed doors. The preparation of a second list begins today.

“What we noticed with the first list was that there were way too many pipelines and LNG terminals which were prioritised by the Commission, which if approved are likely to threaten the EU’s climate targets for 2030 and beyond,” says Bankwatch’s Kuba Gogolewski. “Regardless of the type of projects that are being considered for prioritisation, their selection should happen in a totally transparent manner, so that civil society and local communities can alert of any environmental and social problems caused by the envisaged routing of these PCIs.”

While the first list was drafted by the Commission after only consulting with energy representatives, NGOs are now calling on DG Energy to ensure a more open and transparent process, including local communities and environmental NGOs, for the selection of projects to be included on the second list.

“DG Energy already promised a more inclusive process, we only hope they will stay true to their word,” says Birgit Schmidhuber from Justice and Environment. “Energy security and an efficient energy market are important goals but should not be achieved at the cost of destruction of environment and mismanagement of public funds.”

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Notes for the editors:

1. See the existing list of PCI projects:

http://ec.europa.eu/energy/infrastructure/pci/pci_en.htm

2. Read recommendations from Justice and Environment and Bankwatch for the choosing of new PCIs:

http://www.justiceandenvironment.org/_files/file/2014/JaE_Bankwatch_PCI%20Process%20Recommendations%202014.pdf