



Controversial energy projects – second round with public involved?

[Brussels, November 20, 2014]

This Friday the European Commission organizes an important meeting for the EU energy sector. The [second list](#) of “Projects of Common Interest” (PCIs) – the EU’s favourite energy projects that are to receive EU funding as well as a guarantee of fast-track permitting – should be publicly proposed. The first list was adopted with only developers involved and it contained many highly controversial projects like a Liquefied-Natural-Gas terminal in Estonia or power lines connecting the Temelin nuclear power plant in the Czech Republic.

Lawyers from Justice & Environment, European Network of Environmental Law Organizations (J&E) assessed three environmentally and socially controversial PCIs from the first list. Based on their [findings](#), J&E is [recommending](#) and will be watching over heightened transparency and participation for NGOs in the second process of selecting PCIs.

J&E lawyer Birgit Schmidhuber comments: “*DG Energy reflected our recommendations and is inviting NGOs for different stages of the PCI designation process. Comments of civil society must be taken into due account to avoid conflicts with NGOs and local communities defending their health and environment.*”

The Austrian J&E lawyer has a close relation to the Kaunertal valley in the Austrian Alps, where a huge project is planned (with a dam with 120 m height and 450 m width). The extension of the Kaunertal Hydro Pump Storage falls under heavy criticism by the civil society and environmental NGOs. It would damage river sanctuaries, compromise a Natura 2000 site and an important refuge zone for alpine species would be completely destroyed. An estimated cost of 1,2 billion Euros makes this project one of the largest and most expensive power plant projects currently developed in Europe, however, its usefulness and economic competitiveness are more than questionable.

In the several months ahead the second list of PCIs will be assessed and commented. NGOs will see if they will be really included or left out of the game this time again. Just like in the proposed project of a high voltage power line in the Czech Republic, which will affect fifty municipalities, dramatically change the face of the landscape and increase health risks for local citizens. On the national level five petitions against the project were organized, fifteen local authorities and seventy individuals expressed strict disapproval with the project in EIA and planning phases. On the EU and regional levels related to the PCI designation very little information and chances to participate were available.

ENDS

Related information:

The first list of current PCIs contains 248 energy infrastructure projects. It will be partly re-evaluated and new projects will be proposed for the second PCI List. A project may earn the PCI label when it contributes to the security of European Energy Supply, sustainability,

market integration and competitiveness (see TEN-E Regulation) – then the public interest from an energy policy perspective is legally established.

Contact:

Birgit Schmidhuber, Lawyer, Justice and Environment, birgit.schmidhuber@oekobuero.at
Csaba Kiss, Coordinator, Justice and Environment, info@justiceandenvironment.org

tel: +36 1 3228462

Notes for the editors:

Justice and Environment (J&E) is an association of public interest environmental law organizations. The objective of J&E is to contribute to a better status of environment and human health in Europe where J&E is active through the use of law (European and national environmental laws) and the improvement of access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters by legal means. To learn more visit <http://justiceandenvironment.org/>

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 selection of new PCIs:

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

3. Read case studies on the controversial PCI projects:

With or without us: Three cases manifesting gaps in designation of EU high priority energy projects - Study and recommendations by Justice and Environment

<http://www.justiceandenvironment.org/files/file/2014/PCI%20case%20studies%202014%2082%29.pdf>