

COM-3/022

Brussels, 8 October 1999

**OPINION**

of the

Committee of the Regions

of 15 September 1999

on the

**Proposal for a European Parliament and Council decision amending Decision No. 1254/96/EC**

**laying down a series of guidelines for trans-European**

**energy networks**

(COM(1998) 542 final - 98/0284 (COD))

**The Committee of the Regions**

**HAVING REGARD TO** the Proposal for a European Parliament and Council decision amending Decision No. 1254/96/EC laying down a series of guidelines for trans-European energy networks (COM(1998) 542 final - 98/0284 (COD))<sup>1</sup>

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision taken by the Council of 23 October 1998, under Article 129d and the first paragraph of Article 198c of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the decision of its Bureau of 15 July 1998 to direct Commission 3 (Trans-European Networks, Transport and Information Society) to draw up the relevant opinion;

**HAVING REGARD TO** the draft opinion (CdR 59/99) adopted by Commission 3 on 15 April 1999 (CdR 59/99 rev. 1) (rapporteur: **Mr Koukoulópoulos**);

**unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 30<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 15 and 16 September**

**1999 (meeting of 15 September).**

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## 1. Introduction

1. On 5 June 1996 the European Parliament and the Council adopted Decision No. 1254/96/EC laying down a series of guidelines for trans-European energy networks. The Annex to this Decision contains an indicative list of projects of common interest identified in the energy sector.
2. The indicative list of projects of common interest was updated by Decision No. 1047/97/EC adopted by the European Parliament and the Council on 29 May 1997. The updating became necessary because of the accession of the three new Member States, the ever faster expansion of interconnected networks on the scale of the European continent and the particularly rapid development of the natural gas market. The indicative list currently contains 74 projects of common interest.
3. The European Commission proposes updating the indicative list of projects of common interest annexed to Decision No. 1254/96/EC, as amended by Decision No. 1047/97/EC, for the following reasons:
  - the rapid development of the market, especially the natural gas market, and the need for network infrastructure to serve it (diversification of supply sources, for example, and increased storage);
  - to pursue the setting-up of interconnected energy networks on the scale of the European continent.
4. In practical terms, this means:
  - in some cases, altering the description of projects of common interest already on the list;
  - adding to the list new projects which have reached an advanced state of preparation.

## 2. General comments

1. The Committee of the Regions believes that laying down and implementing the trans-European energy networks is important for the proper functioning of the internal market, and for improving cohesion with frontier and remote regions of the EU. Indeed, it has already expressed its views on the trans-European energy networks in two previous opinions ( CdR 46/94 fin<sup>2</sup> and CdR 367/96 fin<sup>3</sup>).
2. The fact that measures are being taken on trans-European networks in the sphere of energy is particularly significant, especially as regards measures relating to practical investment planning. More specifically, there is a need to step up Community involvement in the funding of networks that deliver energy to frontier or remote regions of the Union.

3. The funding of projects to connect remote regions, especially isolated regions such as islands, to the trans-European energy networks also helps to improve the stability of energy supplies to these regions. Not only is stable energy supply a common objective of the European Union, but it contributes to these regions' economic and social development and ultimately reinforces the principle of cohesion.
4. The views of local and regional authorities have not been taken into account in the process of planning the trans-European energy networks. This absence of dialogue is likely to substantially delay development of the networks. The COR recommends that the Commission take into account the views of local and regional authorities in its measures, which should establish the practical framework for implementing the trans-European energy networks.
5. Local and regional authorities will be more likely to accept the trans-European energy networks if their environmental impact is properly assessed and the required specifications are met. The COR suggests that the environmental impact of the trans-European energy networks be assessed and that basic technical specifications be laid down to protect the environment during the planning and implementing of the networks. Promoting the market penetration of alternative products on the energy market is just as important as establishing specifications.
6. The COR has already asked the Commission to promote access for energy producers at local and regional level to electricity and natural gas networks at national and EU level. To ensure proper functioning of the internal market and effective use of energy, this criterion must be reflected in EU decisions affecting the linking up of all trans-European energy networks.

### 3. Proposals

Two additional projects are proposed:

1. In Annex I under the heading "Electricity Networks" we would add the following:

*" Spain: strengthening and development of internal connections."*

2. In Annex II under the heading "Electricity Networks" we would add the following:

*" Greece: connection of the islands to the mainland and to each other."*

### 4. Conclusions

1. The COR endorses the Commission's proposal with regard to the introduction of guidelines on trans-European energy networks and the adjustment of decisions taken in order to meet current needs.
2. The COR particularly welcomes the introduction of practical funding systems for connecting pan-European energy networks, especially in remote and frontier regions of the EU.

3. The COR for its part is prepared to work together with the Commission and with local and regional authorities to ensure that decisions taken are appropriate to the planning process on this issue. Environmental impact analysis, technical requirements to protect the environment and effective dialogue with local and regional authorities will facilitate implementation of the networks in a practical way.
4. Energy producers at local and regional level must have access to the pan-European energy networks.
5. The COR calls for the proposal for a Council Directive to introduce rational planning techniques in the electricity and natural gas distribution sectors (COM(95) 369 final<sup>4</sup>) to also be applied to projects relating to pan-European energy networks.

Brussels, 15 September 1999.

The President

The Acting Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

**Manfred Dammeyer**

**Vincenzo Falcone**

<sup>1</sup> OJ C 320 of 17/10/1998, p. 12

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 217 of 6.8.1994, p. 26

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 116 of 14.4.1997, p 96

<sup>4</sup> OJ C 1 of 4/1/1996, p. 6

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