

17th meeting of the Commission Expert Group on electricity interconnection targets

Brussels, 15 - 16 May 2019

Summary of the meeting

1. Welcome and recapitulation of the 16th meeting

The Chair of the Expert Group, Ms Catharina Sikow-Magny, Head of Unit Networks and Regional Initiatives in the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy opened the afternoon session and presented the agenda.

2. Discussion and finalisation of the draft report on public acceptance

The Chair opened the session and thanked the experts for their input in writing to the third and most recent version of the Report on public acceptance. Due to exceptional circumstances, the 17th meeting of the Commission Expert Group on electricity interconnection targets initially scheduled on 14 February has been postponed to 15 and 16 May, allowing the experts and the Commission more time for exchanges in writing. The Chair reminded the experts that the Report had to be finalized during the meeting in order to be formally handed over and presented to the Commissioner in June. Rather than pairing with the Report on “Electricity interconnection with third countries”, the experts agreed that the workstream on public acceptance should appear as a standalone Report with its own executive summary.

The Chair invited Ms Oana Langa to present the final draft of the report on public acceptance.

The title had been finally agreed by the experts and reads as “Commission Expert Group Report on Public engagement and acceptance in the planning and implementation of electricity interconnectors”. Several paragraphs have been redrafted during the meeting in order to reflect the exchanges. The discussion mainly focused on the set of recommendations that the experts decided to put forward. Naturally deriving from the previous sections of the report, the conclusions and the recommendations addressed the main challenges for increasing acceptance of electricity infrastructure and highlighted the practices that best mitigate these challenges.

The Chair thanked the experts for the work done during the past months on this report and confirmed its completion.

3. Welcome and introduction on the new task of the Expert Group

The Chair introduced the topic that is expected to become the focus of the Expert Group’s third report: sector coupling / sectorial integration. Being a wide topic, the Chair clarified that, in order to add value to the existing work on this topic in other fora, the report should focus

on the link with infrastructure and interconnections in particular. The report could provide useful input for discussions in the next Energy Infrastructure Forum in Copenhagen in June 2020.

4. Preliminary discussions on sector coupling

The Expert Group agreed that the two concepts of “Sector Coupling” and “Sectorial Integration” (SC/SI) are very close to each other and that distinctive definitions for each of them would not be instrumental in the framework of this report. Both concepts refer to interlinking different energy sectors and identifying interactions between energy carriers, on the generation, transmission and demand side. They thus cover electrification of additional end-use sectors, but also technologies that allow the coupling of i.a. electricity and gas, such as power-to-gas (P2G). In addition, a limitation of sector coupling to the electricity and gas sectors is too restrictive and the concept should cover other energy carriers (liquid fuels and heat) as well.

SC/SI are not ends in themselves and must be seen as instrumental to achieve overall energy system optimisation, in particular through a better integration of renewable energy sources, and considered from that perspective.

The Expert Group’s reflection on SC/SI will be placed in the framework of decarbonisation scenarios for the EU by 2050. For this purpose, it will not develop its own scenarios, but will refer to those presented in the European Commission 2018 Communication “A Clean Planet for all - A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy.”

Electrification is expected to become one of the main pathways (if not the main one) towards the decarbonisation of the EU economy, but it will need to develop in combination with specific roles for other sectors, such as gas. In particular, SC/SI can provide sources of flexibility to address seasonal storage needs or the operational challenges stemming from the intermittency of renewable sources, through the conversion of energy from electricity to gas, heat or liquid fuels (Power-to-X, P2X).

The Expert Group will focus on how the deployment of SC/SI would affect the future of energy infrastructure in the EU, in particular electricity infrastructure and the specific impact for interconnections.

5. Next steps

The next meeting of the Expert Group will coincide with the formal handover of the two Reports of the Expert Group on “Electricity interconnections with third countries” and “Public engagement and acceptance in the planning and implementation of electricity interconnectors” tentatively scheduled in June 2019.

Present

Commission: Catharina Sikow-Magny (Chair), Oana Langa (Policy officer), Ignacio Asenjo (Policy officer), Sebastian Gras (Policy officer)

Robert Schroeder (ENTSO-E),

Maria Concepcion Sanchez Perez (ENTSO-E),

Maria Chiara Cavarretta (ENTSO-E),

Simon Norambuena (ENTSO-E),

Michal Smyk (PGE),

Paulina Beato,

Pierre Bernard (Friends of the Supergrid),

Yannick Phulpin (Eurelectric),

Brian Vad Mathiesen,

Jochen Kreusen (European Association of the Electricity Transmission and Distribution Equipment),

Nikolaos Vasilakos (European Renewable Energies Federation),

Liutauras Varanavicius (LITGRID AB),

Antonella Battaglini (RGI),

Maciej Jakubik (CEEP)

Hodne Tor Eigil, Statnett