

President Radev and the government are sending the green transition on a wild-goose chase

Politicians must take personal responsibility for failed reforms and measures

The political crisis, which has been going on for over two years, has led to frequent elections and government changes and additionally - to the loss of a clear vision amongst some of the politicians for Bulgaria's path towards Europe.

Putin's brutal aggression against Ukraine has also strengthened the positions of oligarchic circles in the country, which are funding a campaign of anti-European sentiments and resistance against the Green Deal and the just energy transition.

The inability of the political parties to form a government has transferred all the power, but also the responsibility to the President and the appointed by him caretaker governments. The absurd statement, made by the caretaker government from August 2022 that "Gazprom is inevitable", as well as the strategy of fearmongering about the coming winter with claims of "chaos and destruction" in the energy sector at a time when the EU was making huge efforts to free itself from Russian gas dependence is particularly indicative of the instructions President Radev has been giving to the government.

Following Deputy Prime Minister Pekanov's letter to the EC requesting the postponement of the submission of the Territorial Just Transition Plans for the three coal regions (Stara Zagora, Pernik, Kyustendil) until 2023, the most likely consequences will be the loss of €100 mln - this year's tranche from the Just Transition Fund, and an unclear outcome for the next payment.

This lost €100 mln is actually half of the money that the Pernik and Kyustendil regions would have received from the Just Transition Fund. And these are also the regions that are ready to fulfil the energy transition and this lost sum of money has the potential to make the process irreversible for them.

But at the moment they are being held hostage to the struggles of various lobbies and their mega projects in the Stara Zagora region. **This is yet another reason to insist that the regions be divided and that those who are ready and have the political will from the local authorities to fulfil the reforms and the green transition to be funded and supported with technical assistance.**

The reason for these endless delays in the various ministries of all the plans and measures related to reforms in the energy sector comes from the lack of clear and explicit instructions to the administration on the importance of these measures.

Unfortunately the corrupt approach of the Borissov governments towards the European green transition policies continues with the governments appointed by President Radev - to postpone any real action, to delay reforms and to expect more money from EU funds even after all deadlines have passed. Of course, this is done with the active support of the outdated trade unions and businessmen with ties to the old State Security who have interests in maintaining the status quo in the energy sector.

There is a real danger that the money from the second payment under the National Resilience and Recovery Plan (NRRP) will be lost as well. €724 mln is expected in the first quarter of 2023 but the necessary reforms and measures have not been implemented by the government.

Kiril Petkov's regular government established the structure and the framework for the work of the European Green Deal Advisory Council through eight subcommittees out of which four have already been launched, including the Energy Transition Commission. Not only did the establishment of the remaining committees not occur, the work of the experts and ministries in the already existing committees was delayed and obstructed in such ways as to ensure that the promised reforms and legislative changes are not implemented.

President Radev and Deputy Prime Minister Pekanov should have been aware long ago that **the money for the green (and digital) transition is money for reforms.**

They also need to be aware that climate targets are not abstract policies but are directly related to the health and quality of life of Bulgarians. Our country is third in the world in terms of deaths caused by air pollution. Any politician who goes to Galabovo and promises to preserve jobs at Brikel power plant needs to know that he is also promising to continue to poison people with air rich in various sulphur and nitrogen based chemical compounds that are harmful to humans.

The constant attempts to renegotiate reforms and projects in the NRRP, to finance various lobby interests through EU funds block the whole process of reforms and a smooth energy transition and risk to lead to this transition - which is inevitable - to occur without the financial assistance of the European Union and to much more severe economic and social consequences for the regions. **The renegotiation of the plan will block and delay for months the implementation of important for households and businesses projects such as the energy efficiency programme for multifamily residential buildings, the programme for renewable energy sources, the programme for batteries for businesses and others,** which will reduce not only the bills but also our energy dependence on foreign fossil fuel suppliers.

Attempts to include mainly energy megaprojects in the plans are completely inconsistent with the philosophy of the energy transition itself - to fund projects related to energy efficiency, promotion of new jobs, the decentralisation of the electricity production and access to renewable energy sources for individual households.

Of course, energy megaprojects here are traditionally associated with a huge amount of corruption, which makes them attractive to politicians and oligarchs seeking to enrich themselves at the expense of the national budget - such as the "corruption swamp" NPP Belene (direct quote from former PM Boyko Borissov) or the construction of the Balkan/TurkStream gas pipeline.

If at this time Bulgaria loses the opportunities to finance the green transition with funds from the various EU funds, politicians need to bear personal responsibility for this failure.

Without the funds from the NRRP, the Just Transition Fund, the Modernisation Fund and other EU funds it will be impossible to carry out a smooth just energy transition in Bulgaria. What will follow

instead will be an unjust and abrupt transition, the price of which will be paid not only by those employed in the energy sector, but also by everyone else.

With this in mind,

- President Radev and the governments appointed by him should be aware that they will be personally responsible if due to their inaction or wrong decisions Bulgaria is deprived of EU funding for its energy transition.

The lack of a regular government does not absolve either the President, nor his appointed ministers from responsibility.

We expect from the President and his appointed governments:

- To implement all of the commitments made so far and to not delay the promised reforms, but rather to accelerate their implementation considering the huge delay. This is in line with Bulgarian national interests.
- To not allow the green transition to be compromised by lobbyists and businessmen with dubious interests in the energy sector.
- To prioritise the funding of such projects proposed by the government and regions which are related to energy efficiency, decentralisation of the electricity production and the facilitated access to RES for households and energy cooperatives.
- To prioritise the financing of job creation in the coal regions and to stop the campaign portraying the energy transition as slashing jobs.

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