

“We are not saying that we are surprised that Serbia did not inform us about the start of construction, but unfortunately there is no dialogue with the Serbian side”, says Janez Kopac, Director of the Secretariat of the Energy Community.

It is not only strange to the local public that the large infrastructure project “Turkish Stream” pipeline is being built in secret. It is also strange to representatives of the Energy Community who give opinions and monitor the development of this project in order to comply with European regulations, and Serbia is also a member. In particular, the Third Energy Package, which does not allow the pipeline owner to be the owner of the gas, but insists on competition from gas suppliers.

It is strange that a major project such as the “Turkish Stream” pipeline, which from Turkey via Bulgaria, Serbia and Hungary to Austria should bring Russian gas, is kept secret. We are not saying that we are surprised that Serbia did not inform us about the start of construction, but unfortunately there is no dialogue with the Serbian side. Therefore, the start of work out of the public eye is not surprising at all – says Janez Kopac, director of the Secretariat of the Energy Community of Southeast Europe, based in Vienna.

Asked what specifically the Energy Community has objections to and what the “Gastrans” company and the Energy Agency did not do, and construction has moved on, Kopac replies that the Secretariat was very determined in its opinion already in March this year.

“The decision of the Energy Agency of Serbia of March 2019 as such does not contribute to the development of competition in the natural gas market in Serbia, unless all conditions in the opinion of the Energy Community are respected. Although AERS did change some of the original conditions in the final decision, not all of our conditions were met. Especially the part that was about improving competition. That is why we believe that this decision, as it turned out, actually violates the Third Energy Package” – says Kopač.

This is where it especially refers to its article on the exclusion of new infrastructure.

Therefore, there is currently no open dialogue with the Serbian side to resolve this issue.

The insistence, our interlocutor adds, that the capacity of the new pipeline should be offered to all interested parties in the auction (up to 20 years in the long run) was transformed into the exempted part of the Third Package, only for those who participated in the previous market test.

“This, in our opinion, further limits the availability of capacity allocation in the procedure and excludes others from leasing the same” – says Kopac.

The energy community, by the way, was very explicit in its opinion. It was requested that the leases of the “Turkish Stream” capacity through Serbia be ceded to others. All with the aim of avoiding that the pipeline owner also be the owner of the gas and thus prevent the monopoly required by the Third Energy Package.

Asked if this failure to comply with the opinion of the Energy Community could have consequences for the development of this project, Kopac says that the overall situation is

not yet clear.

“What is happening in Bulgaria, what about Hungary, what about the regulatory framework for Serbia? The certification of “Gastrans”, which builds a gas pipeline through Serbia, should pass our opinion as well.” - Kopač points out.

Having in mind that the whole case in Bulgaria is in court because of a tender complained about by a potential Arab contractor, who was first considered for building this pipeline, Kopač says he cannot comment on the behaviour of a country outside the Energy Community.

“But, unfortunately, given the delays in the realization of other interconnectors to neighbors, this case is not surprising to us either” - he points out.

As for Serbia, there will be no unpleasant surprises for her, at least when it comes to the Energy Community. The community says much earlier what it thinks of the project and how it is being implemented, precisely because of the stability of the regulatory framework, our interlocutor concludes.

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