
PIPING GAS INTO THE PARLIAMENT: AHEAD OF KEY VOTE ON TEN-E REVISION, PRO-GAS MEP LEADING NEGOTIATIONS REFUSES TO REVEAL LOBBYING

Europe already has more than enough gas infrastructure, and to avoid wrecking the climate we need to make massive cuts in gas usage. But dirty energy companies are still lobbying to push taxpayer subsidies for fossil gas projects. Friendly MEPs echoing their cause are helping to delay a real climate action.

Polish MEP Zdzisław Krasnodębski, from the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, has an influential role in reforming the EU's rules governing billions of euros in energy subsidies. But his pro-fossil gas views – as well as lobbying by gas industry groups – threaten to push the Parliament towards backing yet more climate-wrecking fossil fuel projects.¹

A joint investigation by Global Witness and Corporate Europe Observatory shows that Krasnodębski is refusing to reveal what meetings he has held with lobbyists, has hosted events for the fossil gas lobby, and the amendments he has tabled which mirror industry demands are now close to being adopted by the whole Parliament. Krasnodębski has echoed industry arguments that the EU should continue to support building new gas infrastructure despite both plentiful existing capacity,² and the need to make massive cuts in gas use in order to meet the Paris climate goals.³

In January 2021 Krasnodębski was appointed as lead MEP, or rapporteur, for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE).⁴ This Committee leads on the European Parliament's negotiating position for the revision of the Trans-European Networks for Energy Regulation (TEN-E), an EU law that controls where billions of euros in subsidies for energy projects will flow.⁵

Krasnodębski's final report on the revision of the regulation, which has been negotiated with representative MEPs from the other political groups in the Parliament, will be voted on by the ITRE committee on 27 September 2021.⁶ The stakes could not be higher, as the regulation will decide whether the EU will continue to support fossil fuel projects that are impossible to reconcile with action on climate change, or whether funding and other benefits will be shifted to genuinely sustainable infrastructure. The final outcome will determine the position of the Parliament in ensuing negotiations with the Council and Commission, but unless the Committee votes against Krasnodębski's

position, it appears likely that fossil gas will still be supported.

LOBBYING SECRECY

In response to requests by Corporate Europe Observatory in June and July 2021, Krasnodębski refused to reveal what meetings he has held with lobbyists on the TEN-E revision, saying that he would reveal the meetings before the law is voted on in the European Parliament, currently scheduled for the 27 September 2021.⁷

Internal guidance issued to MEPs by the European Parliament sets the deadline for disclosure of meetings as the “date of the relevant vote in committee or in plenary... Provided this general deadline is observed, meetings can be declared before or after they take place, depending on Member's individual convenience and choice”.⁸ However, Krasnodębski’s reluctance to disclose meetings ahead of the vote stands in contrast to the other lead MEPs on the file, known as shadow rapporteurs, who have almost all disclosed their meetings already.

Krasnodębski’s reluctance to be transparent over this lobbying prevents public scrutiny in advance of legislation being voted on and raises concerns about the impact of undisclosed lobbying.⁹ In response to questions from Global Witness this week Krasnodębski stated that his meetings on TEN-E would be released “in due time”.¹⁰

Krasnodębski’s contacts with lobbyists regarding the TEN-E file before March 2021 were however disclosed in a draft report filed by the MEP and give a flavour of who has been attempting to influence the policy.¹¹

The disclosure shows Krasnodębski was lobbied by at least a dozen different gas companies or trade associations representing gas industry interests. Lobbyists who gained

access to Krasnodębski include the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP) whose members include Shell, Exxon, and Saudi Aramco; gas companies like the Polish PGNiG; and the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSO-G), the controversial gas industry group delegated significant powers under the current TEN-E regulation.¹²

KEEPING CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS: ENTSO-G

ENTSO-G with a membership of 45 gas companies, such as Italy’s Snam, Poland’s Gaz-System, and Belgium’s Fluxys, currently holds an influential role deciding which energy projects the EU supports.¹³

Global Witness’ research last year found a serious conflict of interest at the heart of this arrangement: over 80 percent of all EU fossil gas subsidies since 2013 have gone to projects ENTSO-G members are involved in.¹⁴ The TEN-E revision offers an opportunity to remove the gas industry from these decisions though proposals from the Council and Presidency have thus far failed to take on this conflict of interest.¹⁵

ENTSO-G has told Global Witness that it is the role of regulators, the European Council and others prevent any conflict of interest and it acts only as an expert in assessing all proposed projects without discrimination while the Commission decides which gas projects to back.¹⁶

KRASNODĘBSKI'S TIES TO THE GAS LOBBY

Krasnodębski is an active member of the European Energy Forum,¹⁷ a MEP-industry group that says it arranges events for “the transparent exchange of information and opinions on all political, economic, and technological aspects of energy policy”.¹⁸ The group claims to have “openness, inclusiveness, neutrality, and balance at the core of all our activities”¹⁹ though it bars journalists and NGOs unless they endorse their values, which are not publicly listed. Its closed door meetings are largely made up of MEPs, European Commission officials, or representatives of its member companies – made up largely of fossil fuel companies.²⁰ Corporate Europe Observatory has previously reported that the forum is a useful mechanism for the gas industry to communicate its policy demands to MEPs and to secure their presence in the European Parliament without too much publicity.²¹

Krasnodębski told Global Witness this week that the Forum’s role was “very much appreciated in the legislative process” and noted that MEPs from other political groups in the Parliament were also members.²²

Krasnodębski’s Polish political party PiS has also had a close relationship with the fossil fuel industry. The 2018 UN climate talks in Katowice in Poland, overseen by the PiS administration, were sponsored by a range of coal, oil, and gas companies. Perhaps not surprisingly PiS MEPs have voted against both the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, and boosting environmental justice.²³

Krasnodębski has not only met industry lobbyists himself, he has supported them reaching other MEPs. In 2018 he hosted an event run by gas industry lobbying group GasNaturally inside the European Parliament

which promoted liquified gas as a shipping fuel. At the same event, the Polish company Gaz-System promoted their gas import terminal in Świnoujście and its Baltic pipe project, sending North Sea gas from Norway to Denmark and Poland.²⁴

In 2016 Krasnodębski organised another event in the European Parliament hosting a Polish minister who promoted plans for the Baltic pipe project.²⁵ Lobbying around the project has paid off, given that it has received €266 million in subsidies from the EU after securing status as a Project of Common Interest (PCI) under the current TEN-E law.²⁶ Forty other gas projects have also been granted PCI status, paving the way for subsidies and fast-track approvals under the TEN-E regulation.²⁷

THE GRANDFATHERING PROBLEM

After growing public pressure, the European Commission put forward a plan to exclude fossil gas projects entirely when it published its proposals for a revision of the TEN-E law in December 2020. The Council responded by proposing to “grandfather”, or write exceptions into the law that would support two current gas PCI projects: the proposed EastMed pipeline from Israel to Cyprus and Greece, and the Melita pipeline between Sicily and Malta. The proposal came despite a push by 11 countries at the Council to exclude any fossil fuel projects.²⁸

But industry groups such as Eurogas,²⁹ and MEPs like Krasnodębski, argued that even more gas projects should continue to be funded, despite the need to move away from fossil fuel dependence to tackle the climate emergency. In his March 2021 draft report on the TEN-E revision, Krasnodębski proposed an amendment that would allow all gas projects that currently have PCI status to be protected by being grandfathered into the new TEN-E

revision, though under compromises reached with other MEPs these projects would not be eligible for certain EU funding.³⁰ This protection has been maintained in the latest compromise amendments seen by Global Witness.

Krasnodębski argued in his amendment that fossil gas offered the opportunity to reduce emissions compared to coal,³¹ echoing the so-called “bridge fuel” argument deployed by the fossil fuel industry to argue for switching to fossil gas rather than genuinely sustainable energy options.³²

In a similar vein in June 2020 he wrote an article for *The Parliament Magazine* trying to persuade his colleagues that: “Natural gas, given its low emissions compared to oil and coal, is considered an energy source with the potential to contribute significantly to the reduction greenhouse gas emissions [sic] in the medium and long-term.”³³ The article was so pro-fossil gas that US gas industry lobbyists LNGAllies even reposted it on their own website.³⁴

An assistant for Krasnodębski told Global Witness this week that he “believes that in order to meet the EU’s climate and sustainability goals, all sectors have to increase their use of renewable energy sources and phase out fossil fuels. At the same time, in his view, the natural gas has an important role of transitional fuel, considering the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.”³⁵

In reality each unit of fossil gas we use gets us further away from a safe climate. While the carbon emissions from burning fossil gas are lower than for coal, once potent climate-warming methane emissions from its supply chains are taken into account, the overall impact of fossil gas on the planet can be as bad or worse than coal.³⁶ In order to achieve

the Paris Agreement goal of keeping warming under 1.5°C – something scientists warn must be achieved to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis – gas production and consumption must drop by 40 per cent worldwide over this decade.³⁷ Building new fossil gas infrastructure with expected lifespans of decades threatens to lock Europe into fossil fuels for far too long.

GREENWASHING WITH HYDROGEN

In June 2020 Krasnodębski was among the targeted recipients of a joint letter from gas industry groups including Gas Infrastructure Europe (GIE) and ENTSO-G, together with oil and gas giants like Exxon, arguing for a “technology-neutral approach to drive the most cost-efficient and cost-effective decarbonization”.³⁸ The concept of “technology-neutral” approaches to making decisions about energy systems is widespread in fossil fuel lobbying. The concept suggests that governments shouldn’t proactively prioritise any particular energy solution, often allowing fossil fuel technologies to continue to receive support based on short term arguments around partial emissions reductions or cost savings.³⁹

This language has been directly adopted by Krasnodębski. A TEN-E amendment he supported in April 2021 echoed the idea of the “technological neutrality principle and therefore not singling out apriori [sic] any specific technology on the ground other than its potential for emission reduction in the end use”.⁴⁰

The joint letter sent to Krasnodębski in June 2020 emphasised this argument with reference to hydrogen technology; fossil fuel companies have been lobbying hard for fossil gas-derived hydrogen to be supported by governments.⁴¹ Krasnodębski’s March 2021

disclosure also showed he has been lobbied by Hydrogen Europe,⁴² an influential lobby group that includes fossil fuel giants Shell, Total, and Equinor, companies keen to maintain their business model by using fossil gas for ‘blue’ hydrogen.⁴³

‘Blue’ hydrogen is made from fossil gas, using carbon capture and storage to remove some of the carbon emissions, and rivals ‘green’ hydrogen which is made using 100 per cent renewable electricity. While the gas industry has promoted blue hydrogen as ‘low carbon’, a recent analysis by US academics has found it may be more polluting than burning gas or coal.⁴⁴ Blue hydrogen looks to be a dangerous trap, justifying continued damaging fossil fuel use at a vast cost and shifting funding away from genuinely sustainable solutions.⁴⁵

Krasnodębski’s political group is also siding with the gas lobby to open up TEN-E to more blue hydrogen by proposing that the new category of ‘smart gas grids’ would allow projects to be supported by the EU if they include mixing a small proportion of fossil hydrogen into the gas grid, through ‘blending’.⁴⁶ Industry groups argue that by mixing in hydrogen, small greenhouse gas reductions are possible while still using existing gas infrastructure.⁴⁷ However, this loophole would open the door to continued public funding of new gas infrastructure under the guise of blending a small proportion of hydrogen into fossil gas grids. Compromise amendments put forward by MEPs from ECR and other political groups in July uses very similar language to amendments that gas lobby group Eurogas sent to MEPs.⁴⁸

Given the significant uncertainties around the deployment of fossil hydrogen and blending it into the gas grid, this risks wasting more EU public funds on fossil fuel projects.⁴⁹ Since entering into force in 2013, the TEN-E

regulation has facilitated nearly €5 billion in taxpayer funded grants and subsidized loans for 41 fossil gas infrastructure projects.⁵⁰ A significant share of these projects have been delayed or even abandoned, in part due to increasing local opposition, resulting in a waste of nearly €450 million in EU subsidies.⁵¹ Moreover, growing evidence shows that Europe actually has more gas infrastructure than needed.⁵² Blending hydrogen only serves to greenwash the gas industry. It would push up costs for consumers,⁵³ do little to reduce emissions and instead lock-in existing gas infrastructure and delay the needed phase out of the gas system.

LOBBYING FAR AND WIDE

Fossil gas interests spend vast amounts attempting to influence EU policy. A June 2021 analysis of lobbying disclosures by Global Witness found that fossil gas companies and their associations have spent around €300 million lobbying the EU since 2010, and 50 gas company staff hold passes allowing them to access and lobby at the European Parliament.⁵⁴

Shadow rapporteurs on the TEN-E file have also been lobbied by the gas industry. Dutch European People’s Party MEP Tom Berendson was heavily lobbied by the gas industry: he disclosed meeting six times with gas industry lobbyists including Royal Dutch Shell, Eurogas, and the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers (IOGP).⁵⁵

Socialists & Democrats MEP Erik Bergkvist has also disclosed numerous meetings with the gas industry, meeting the Norwegian oil and gas giant Equinor, the German gas and electric company E.ON, and ENTSO-G.⁵⁶ Renew’s Claudia Gamon has also met with industry groups ENTSO-G, GIE, Equinor, and Gas Distributors for Sustainability.⁵⁷

In contrast Sandra Pereira, a Portuguese shadow rapporteur from the Left group, was lobbied by industry group Gas Infrastructure Europe but otherwise met few other lobby groups according to her disclosures.⁵⁸ Green MEP Marie Toussaint's disclosures show that while she did hold numerous meetings on the legislation, she did not meet gas industry representatives.⁵⁹

Joining Krasnodębski in not disclosing meetings is MEP Paolo Borchia, from Italy's La Lega who did not respond to requests from Corporate Europe Observatory.⁶⁰

Corporate Europe Observatory requested minutes of lobby meetings held by Berendson and Bergkvist with industry lobbyists, however according to the MEPs no minutes of the meetings were kept making detailed scrutiny impossible.⁶¹

THE HEAT IS ON

2021 has been plagued with extreme weather events. Madrid was declared a disaster zone after a February snowstorm.⁶² In July, Storm Bernd caused floods that swept through Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands killing over a hundred people.⁶³ Wildfires raged across Greece, Turkey, and Italy forcing the EU to mount one of its largest firefighting operations ever in August.

Experts are clear that these extreme weather events have been made far more likely by climate change.⁶⁴ They are also clear that only rapid and drastic reductions in greenhouse gases this decade can prevent temperatures rising over 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.⁶⁵

Without urgent action to reduce emissions from fossil fuels, temperatures will continue

to rise bringing widespread devastation and extreme weather.

It is against this backdrop that the fossil gas industry continues to court influential MEPs aiming to keep pushing public money towards even more fossil gas infrastructure.

Corporate Europe Observatory and Global Witness believe that much like the tobacco industry was excluded from lobbying on health policy, the fossil fuel industry's lobbying on climate and energy policy must be curbed.

We can no longer afford to let the fossil fuel industry undermine progress as we try to halt climate chaos, fix our energy system, and protect people and the planet.

To tackle the climate emergency, and ensure that climate policy is conducted entirely in the public interest, we must cut fossil fuel interests out of politics, similar to existing restrictions on the tobacco industry. Along with nearly 200 other organisations we are calling for a fossil free politics.⁶⁶

When it comes to the European Parliament voting on its position on how best to reform the TEN-E regulation, MEPs must vote to end the fossil gas industry's use of this regulation to fund and fast-track fossil fuel projects. That means voting to exclude all fossil gas projects, including the grandfathering of existing projects or those under the guise of 'blending'. That also means voting to remove the power of the gas industry itself, in the form of ENTSO-G, from the heart of the decision-making process.

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⁶⁰ Corporate Europe Observatory contacted the office of Paolo Borchia several times in June 2021 but received no response.

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⁶⁶ Fossil Free Politics, 'Demands', <https://www.fossilfreepolitics.org/#Demands> This content is the sole responsibility of Corporate Europe Observatory and Global Witness and should not be regarded as reflecting the position of any of the more than 200 organisations supporting the call for fossil-free politics, including the founders.