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EU Energy Security Requires Hard Power

Heiko Borchert and Karina Forster of the IPA see hard power as integral to the preservation of energy infrastructure. EU-NATO cooperation is therefore key to preserving this vital element of energy security.

This two-part commentary outlines proposals for EU-NATO cooperation on energy infrastructure security. Infrastructure is at the heart of energy security, which is vital to keeping the \$2.5 trillion transatlantic trade relationship running.

No energy security without energy infrastructure security

Europe receives 85% of its gas imports by pipeline, and over 95% of the United States' oil imports arrive by sea. Attacks on pipelines, terminals or electronic control elements, all part of energy infrastructure, can disrupt supply. Chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 88% of Persian Gulf oil is delivered, need protection. The explosion of a tanker in the port of Rotterdam would likely affect an important European trading place.

Securing energy infrastructures requires a comprehensive approach that looks at ends, ways, and means to identify and explore natural energy resources and to refine, store, transport, and distribute the relevant products.

Competition is not enough to guarantee the security of energy infrastructures

The EU has recognized energy security as a strategic challenge and is focusing on competition through the common European market for gas and electricity to achieve it. Stimulating competition is also the EU's preferred approach to bring energy supply infrastructure investments in line with the needs of the common European energy market.

Competition, however, only works in a very limited segment of the global energy supply chain: the European market. By contrast, about 85-90 % of the world's oil reserves fall under direct government control, and state players account for roughly three-quarters of the world's oil and gas production. Thus there is a power asymmetry in the global energy supply chain that seriously limits the EU's competition-based approach.

As a consequence, competition will not suffice to help secure a pipeline that crosses troubled hot spots in the Greater Middle East or in Central Asia. In the end, this task will also require hard power, a fact which is hardly acknowledged in Europe.

Diverging hard power approaches

During last year's EU-US summit in Vienna and the G-8 summit in St. Petersburg the important role of energy infrastructure security was underlined, but political rhetoric has prevailed.

In particular, the EU has shunned any debate on the role of hard power in guaranteeing Europe's energy supply. This is a serious deficit, as the EU has launched an ambitious external energy agenda that is focused primarily on soft power, mainly through dialogue with key production, transit and consumption countries.

More surprisingly, hard power references are also missing in two EU capstone documents:

the new [European Program on Critical Infrastructure Protection](#), which outlines criteria to identify European critical infrastructure, does not address the necessary capabilities needed for protection. And the [Long-Term Vision of the European Defense Agency](#), which outlines future European capability requirements, makes no reference to energy infrastructure security at all.

Across the Atlantic and in NATO the situation looks different. According to the Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, the United States spends around \$50 billion per year to defend sea lines of communication and to provide military assistance to oil-supplying partner countries.

In NATO a clear consensus has not yet emerged, but since the [2006 Riga Summit](#) the Alliance has a mandate to address the interplay between energy security and possible NATO contributions. Furthermore the [Comprehensive Political Guidance](#) identifies critical infrastructure protection as a future capability requirement for NATO forces.

The EU's reluctance to address the role of hard power in providing energy infrastructure security is thus not only a problem for European energy security, but also for transatlantic cooperation.

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