

APREN: labelling nuclear and natural gas as sustainable energies is “climate setback”

The European Parliament voted in favour of classifying some natural gas and nuclear energy projects as “green”, integrating them into the European taxonomy and thus considering them aligned with the energy transition and the climate targets of the European Union. 18 of the 21 Portuguese MEPs voted against this option.

[APREN – Portuguese Renewable Energy Association](#) regrets that the European Parliament has moved forward with the approval of the classification of nuclear energy and natural gas as sustainable, accepting the proposal for a green taxonomy.

The approval came after the European Parliament rejected, on July 6, a motion to oppose the inclusion of both as environmentally sustainable economic activities, under the Delegated Taxonomy Act of the European Commission.

In order to be considered sustainable, electricity production projects using natural gas must have life-cycle emissions below 100g CO₂/kWh, or meet a series of strict conditions and obtain a building permit by 2030. Natural gas combined cycle plants must have plans to switch to renewable or low carbon gases by the end of 2035, in line with an overall CO₂ emissions limit of 270 g/kWh or annual emissions not exceeding an average of 550 kg/kW in 20 years.

In what regards nuclear energy, the inclusion implies investment in new Generation III+ projects with construction approved by 2045, as well as investment in R&D in advanced technologies that promote safety and minimal waste, and in extending the life of nuclear power plants already existing.

“This position represents a climate setback that jeopardizes the commitments already made to stop climate change, namely the goals of the Paris Agreement, with a view to limiting global warming to an increase of 1.5 degrees centigrade above the values pre-industrial”, underlines the CEO of APREN, Pedro Amaral Jorge.

It is true that nuclear energy does not produce carbon dioxide emissions, but it does generate radioactive waste that Portugal has historically refused. This option would leave us with the difficult problem of managing hazardous waste, in addition to the obvious issues of operational safety in the face of possible disasters that climate change could potentiate.

On the other hand, nuclear power plants take between 10 and 19 years to be built, from their planning to the beginning of their operation, not reflecting, therefore, the urgency of the energy transition.

Accepting natural gas as a sustainable energy is nothing more than masking carbon emissions. Natural gas should be seen as a transition fuel but considering it sustainable will only contribute to delaying the urgent energy transition. It is also a source of energy that makes electricity more expensive, since there is a need to pay for emissions, which has negative financial impacts on the consumer.

“With this new framework, it will be easier for countries to meet green energy targets, giving the illusion that they are on the path of decarbonization, when, in reality, they are moving away from that objective in a way that can be irreversible, as the scientists have warned”, underlines Pedro Amaral Jorge.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine showed that Europe and the world must learn to live without natural gas. “The solution is not to normalize it, seeing it as sustainable energy, but to bet on other renewable gases, such as green hydrogen or synthetic methane”, emphasizes Pedro Amaral Jorge.

“By setting this dangerous precedent, which is contradictory to everything that has been announced, Europe risks seeing other countries in the world follow suit and prioritize nuclear and natural gas over renewables, which are the technologies that can effectively guarantee the energy transition”, he adds.

For APREN it is regrettable that this decision goes against the path initially defined. “In this way, energy dependence on imported fossil fuels is perpetuated instead of focusing on endogenous resources exploited in loco”, summarizes Pedro Amaral Jorge, recalling that this decision will have pernicious impacts in terms of community funding.

APREN praises the position taken by 18 of the 21 Portuguese MEPs, who spoke out against this option and do not recognize natural gas and nuclear as sustainable energies.

If there is no further opposition, the new green taxonomy rules will take effect in 2023.

Lisbon, July 14, 2022

For more information, please refer to:

Diogo Carvalheda | diogo.carvalheda@apren.pt | +351 918 775 963

About APREN:

The Portuguese Renewable Energy Association (APREN) is a non-profit association founded in October 1988. Its mission is to coordinate and represent the common interests of its members, promoting renewables energies in the electricity field.

APREN works closely with the government and other official entities, both on a national and international levels. It participates actively in the definition of energy and environmental policies, valuing natural resources for electricity production, namely hydric, wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, biogas, and urban solid waste.