

# FRANCE PAVING THE WAY FOR A EUROPEAN ENERGY COMMUNITY

Jacques Delors | *Former President of the European Commission, Founder President of Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

Sami Andoura | *Senior Research Fellow at Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*

Michel Derdevet | *Lecturer at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, Professor at the College of Europe in Bruges*

Jacques Delors, Sami Andoura and Michel Derdevet call for accelerating EU cooperation in the energy field. We publish the English translation of this Tribune initially published in *Le Figaro*.

Over sixty years ago, back in the early days when today's Europe was first being forged, the pooling of coal and steel production under the aegis of a common High Authority was to constitute a major step in the construction of strengthened solidarity in the energy field among the six partner countries, and an unquestioned success in the Old World's progress towards peace regained.

This common project is as relevant today as it was back then. A spate of recent debate on the energy transition process provides us with a tremendous opportunity to establish a fully-fledged integrated energy policy in the context of the Lisbon Treaty. What is at stake here for Europe at this (to put it mildly) difficult time, is its chance to play a leading role in the transition towards energy systems that are not only sustainable but also competitive and reliable.

In order to achieve this, the Europeans need to collectively move on, consigning to the history books their "energy patriotism", their permanent dithering which has led to a situation where it is no longer clear who of the Union and its Member States guarantees the shared interests of the peoples of Europe. It is obvious that, whatever the environmental or energy issues of the moment, resorting to isolated national decisions spawns a deterioration of the economic climate for Europe's economies as a whole. Energy is, without doubt, an area of competence which the EU shares with its Member States, and no single European energy mix is going to miraculously pop out of a hat tomorrow. However, that must not become a pretext behind which Member States can hide, a pretext they adopt to explain the glaring absence of cooperation between EU countries: they are already interdependent in the

energy sphere and it is up to us to turn that fact into a trump card.

In order to restore politics its clout, we urgently need to leave behind us the technical recantations and other debates among "experts", which are unintelligible to the man in the street, and to display renewed ambition by establishing a genuine "European Energy Community", imparting a fresh thrust, in that connection, to the vision of excellence which the *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* has been arguing for years and which enjoys the active support of former European Parliament President Jerzy Buzek. French President of the Republic François Hollande has argued the need for such a move on more than one occasion throughout 2012, thus opening up a strong, epoch-making political prospect. It will be important in the future to get the European citizens involved upstream of the move, because as recent opinion polls show, they are clamouring for such a move.

Eschewing a trembling, cap-in-hand approach with third country gas or oil producing countries (such as Russia, Algeria, other countries around the Caspian Sea and elsewhere), this new community could forge genuine, comprehensive and balanced energy partnerships with them, but only on condition that the EU speaks with a single voice and that it takes its place as a strategic and respected player in this field. In the context of our good-neighbourly partnerships with the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean and in Eastern Europe, this community's mission would be to develop a genuine common industrial energy policy designed to allow the businesses of the future, the driving force behind the kind of energy development that is respectful of the planet, to emerge.

It could also, and very rapidly, get involved in strengthening links and solidarity-based exchanges among its members, a necessary move – above and beyond political borders and different energy “cultures” – in the development and sharing of carbon-free forms of energy, and thus to fuel the necessary cooperation among neighbouring states structured into regional groupings. In addition, this will require that the Union has available to it not only a European budget devoted to energy and the environment capable of meeting the challenges, but also such instruments as are required to finance these infrastructures.

In our view, the energy community should also play a social role through the establishment of common rules regulating access to energy for all; “energy poverty” today is a fact impacting millions of European citizens, who will be unable to pay their gas or electricity bills this winter and who cannot simply be left in the lurch. The political impulse to fight this phenomenon must come from Europe itself, just as it has in the past in the field of energy efficiency.

France today is launching a major debate on its transition towards a sustainable society showing greater respect for the environment and concern for future generations. It is the responsibility of France’s, and Europe’s, political authorities to ensure that this debate does not remain exclusively national but takes place in a European context in order to develop its full relevance and that it does not conceal any of the cooperation and solidarity issues which are going to impact future decisions. Let us hope that political authorities are not deaf to this plea and that they prove capable over the coming months of adopting as bold a stance as the situation demands.

Through energy, tomorrow’s Europe can forge a link with the citizens of the Old World, clarifying the significance of this shared project and showing European citizens that such a project is in everyone’s interest, thus forestalling both caricature and incomprehension.

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