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EU proposes \$4.6 bln for energy projects, including Nabucco

The European Commission proposed on Wednesday some 250 million euros for the Nabucco pipeline project, as part of 3.5 billion euros (\$4.6 billion) of planned energy investment after the recent Russia-Ukraine gas dispute.

Bolstering the reliability of energy supplies has soared to the top of the European Union's agenda since Russia invaded Georgia last summer, coming close to a key gas supply route.

The money would be drawn from unspent funds in the EU budget and is part of a wider 5 billion euro (\$3.8 billion) package aimed at reviving Europe's recession-hit economies, AFP reported.

The commission's proposals call in particular for 1.03 billion euros (\$1.35 billion) to be invested in infrastructure improving gas interconnections between EU states, with 700 million euros (\$910 million) for inter-European electricity links.

A further 500 million euros (\$650 million) would go towards offshore wind generation projects and 1.25 billion euros (\$1.63 billion) to carbon capture and storage projects.

Reducing the EU's dependence on Russian gas piped through Ukraine has also become a top priority for the bloc since a standoff between Moscow and Kiev at the start of the year left many countries without supplies in the dead of winter.

"We need to learn the lessons of the recent gas crisis and invest heavily in energy," European Commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso said in a statement.

Spokesman Johannes Laitenberger said the commission hoped EU leaders would approve the proposals at a summit in March, AFP said.

EU includes Nabucco in energy fund

The European Commission proposed on Wednesday some 3.5 billion euros (\$4.6 billion) of funding for energy projects after this winter's gas dispute, including 250 million euros for the Nabucco pipeline, Reuters reported.

Bolstering the reliability of energy supplies has soared to the top of the European Union's agenda since Russia invaded Georgia last summer, coming close to a key gas supply route. The EU received a further shock this month when a gas dispute between Russia and transit country Ukraine cut supplies to Europe. The Commission proposal includes a plan for funding worth 1 billion euros towards gas interconnectors to allow the EU's 27 states to help each other better during gas crises, plus over 500 million euros for wind power projects.



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'Russia not joining Nabucco'

The Russian ambassador to Turkey, Vladimir Ivanovskiy said yesterday in Ankara that his country was not standing against the EU's flagship Nabucco project to carry Caspian gas to the West but made clear that Russia would not be involved in the project.

"EU ambassadors tell me in our private meetings that it is hard to realize the Nabucco project without Russia but the framework of the project will undergo changes if Russia is involved," he said in reference to the commonly cited need for Nabucco to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas supplies.

Enerjisa seals energy deal

Enerjisa, a venture between Sabancı Holding and Austrian partner Verbund, officially took control of the grid in the Turkish capital Ankara at a signing ceremony yesterday after winning a government auction in July with a top bid of \$1.225 billion.

Enerjisa, will pay 50 percent of the \$1.225 billion they offered for a power grid in Ankara over two years after paying half of the amount yesterday, reported Bloomberg citing Sabancı Holding filing with the Istanbul Stock Exchange yesterday.

Sabancı Holding expects its revenue to increase as much as 7 percent this year after buying a power-distribution network with its Austrian partner Verbund yesterday, reported Reuters.

Turkey's Global gets 4 bids for renewable energy unit

Global Yatirim has received four bids from potential partners for a stake in its renewable energy unit, the Turkish investment holding said in a statement on Tuesday.

Global has been searching for a strategic partner for its fully-owned unit Yesil Enerji (Green Energy), which is involved in projects for eight hydroelectric plants with total capacity of approximately 625 megawatts.

Global, which manages a range of investments in the Turkish financial services, infrastructure, real estate and energy sectors, last month extended its deadline for final bids for the Yesil Enerji stake from January to early February.

Energy consumption is growing rapidly in Turkey, boosting hydroelectric, wind and solar energy projects.

Analyst Ezgi Ozturk at Oyak Securities said only one of the Yesil power plants was under construction while the others were at the planning phase.

She added that Global might use proceeds from the transaction for its Izmir port development project. Global won a privatisation tender for the port with Hong Kong's Hutchison last year.



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India's GMR in talks with Turkish companies for power plant

India's GMR Infrastructure Ltd is in talks with Turkish companies to build a natural gas-fired power station with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts, the head of its Turkish unit said late on Wednesday.

Cenk Alpsoy, chief executive of GMR's Istanbul-based unit, said in an interview with Reuters that GMR was meeting companies about possible investment for the project, but did not give names or a figure for any possible investment.

"Turkey's energy market is growing fast and increasingly dynamic ... We are closely watching the Turkish market, and we want to make the investment to build a natural gas-fired plant. At the first stage the optimal investment would build a 1,000 megawatt plant," said Alpsoy.

GMR may join a current project or start from scratch, Alpsoy added.

Turkey's fast growing power consumption has sparked interest from international firms including Austria's Verbund, OMV and Czech Cez.

The growing power production sector relies on natural gas and coal-fired plants as well as a growing number of alternative energy supplies.

The Indian construction firm is active in the construction, airport operation and power sectors.

GMR Infrastructure and Turkey's Limak have an 80 percent stake in the company that manages Istanbul's second airport, Sabiha Gokcen.

A new drinking gourd for Bodrum: Akgedik

Fourteen years after construction began, the Akgedik Dam in the western city of Muğla is finally storing water. This is a much awaited delight for Bodrum and Milas. Both districts will receive water from the dam.

Although construction on the Akgedik dam in the Milas region of Muğla began in 1995, only now has the reservoir behind it filled with water. The dam will provide 5 million cubic meters of Bodrum's drinking water and agricultural irrigation for Milas per month.

The Aydın Directorate of State Waterworks Authority, or DSI, had started building the Dam of Akgedik inside the borders of Yusufça and Körçeğiz villages, where the Sarõçay River passes through, Jan 2, 1995. The river is fed with the famous Labranda water from the mountains of Turgut and Kürkumes.

The dam is 50 meters high from its foundations, with a capacity of 30 million cubic meters of water and was finished last month at a cost of 90 million Turkish liras.

The dam will irrigate 2,091 hectares of agricultural area in Milas that belong to the villages of Damlõboğaz, Yaşyer, Yusufça, Körçağõz, Savran and Avşar, while providing drinking water for Bodrum.



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Vitalizing agriculture

Şahin Arslan, the local administrator of Milas, made an inspection at the dam alongside Ali Akay, the agriculture director of the region, Mustafa Yapıcı, the technical manager of the dam and the village headmen.

Arslan said the dam, which has seen 10 changes of cabinets and energy and natural sources ministers during its construction, has been completed after work was accelerated in the last two years. Arslan said the dam would revitalize the region of Bodrum and Milas.

"Following the airport and the harbors as the most important projects in the area, Akgedik Dam is now operational," he said. "It will transform Milas and Bodrum into paradises and will hold the water that has been flowing nowhere all these years and end the water problem of Bodrum."

Arslan said the agricultural harvest of Milas Plain was expected to increase 300 percent and the struggling agriculture of the area would be revitalized. Ali Demirbaş, the headman of Yusufça Village, said they were happy to see their 14-year-old dreams come true.

Inverting immigration

"Our villagers refused no sacrifice for the construction of the dam," he said. "The well waters that had been used for irrigation of Milas Plain were getting saltier, reducing the harvest. The water that has been flowing for nothing all those years are being held now."

Demirbaş said they are expecting the bids for the waterways that will carry the water to the fields immediately. "The reduction in harvest due to water shortage had caused immigration," he said. "Nobody should suspect that the dam will invert the immigration. The dam became hope for the 20,000 farmers of the area."

Arslan ended his words by saying when the 4 million cubic meters of water being held at the Mumcular Dam of 19 million cubic water capacity is considered, Akgedik being operational will solve the drinking water problem of Bodrum.

Durmuş Ali Çelik, 80 years old resident of Kırcağöz Village who is father of five and grandfather of eleven, said they are happy because their dreams for the dam became real. "The water sources of Milas Plain would not be dry now, if a dam would be built 30 years ago," he added. "I have sold 70 acres of olive groves almost for free for the construction of the dam and the future of our children. So did other villagers because the water coming from Sarıçay was flowing into Güllük Gulf for nothing."

Çelik said geographical characteristics of the area have been changing in recent years ending olive and tobacco farming. "However, Milas Plain has the most fertile land in Muğla," he said. "That is why we are so happy to witness the dam starting to hold water."

Turkish gov't cuts gas prices by %17 for residences, %18 for industry

Turkey cuts natural gas prices 17 percent for residences and 18 percent for industry, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday. The price cut will be effective as of Sunday. (UPDATED)



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Erdogan said the reduction came after the falls in energy prices in the global markets. The price cut will be effective as of Sunday.

Earlier media reports suggested the Turkish Energy Ministry plans to reduce natural gas prices by 10 percent as of Sunday. Hurriyet has said both the ministry and the state energy company BOTAS have been working on a formula to cut the prices.

BOTAS has increased the gas prices by 22 percent in November. The huge increases in the gas costs caused residents to use coal for heating and eventually caused air pollution throughout the country.

The fall in dollar's value against Turkish lira currency and the crude prices prompted the officials to work on a planning to cut the gas prices.

Gediz preserve rescued from the edge of abyss

İzmir Bird Preserve on the Gediz Delta is home to 10 percent of the flamingos in the world, as well as hundreds of other bird species. The Doğa Foundation joined forces to launch a social awareness project for preserving and sustaining the important wetlands with the support of American ice cream brand Ben and Jerry's and İzmir municipalities.

The project's biggest aims are to create a conscious society, beginning with the delta, and cooperate with locals to protect the delta that hosts numerous birds, fish and other species.

"The city was rapidly expanding toward the wetland and the delta was about to vanish when the Doğa Foundation started working for it 15 years ago," said Ben & Jerry's Brand Manager Ceren Türkben. "Ben and Jerry's wanted to cooperate with the foundation because the worldview of the two enterprises clicks. As our motto says: 'The only thing we cannot freeze is time,' we wanted to take action and tell people about climate change and raise awareness. Our biggest role in this project is sharing our knowledge and experience. The corporation in general feels it has responsibilities and acts for a more sustainable environment,"

The struggle to protect and develop the bird preserve has gone through many phases throughout the years. Plans were in the making for turning the delta into a fairground 10 years ago, when the government declared it as a Ramsar area, which is an intergovernmental treaty that foresees the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

At the same time, the Doğa Foundation sued the Mavişehir Building Cooperative to stop the construction of the public housing project, which was expanding toward the delta.

A step toward victory

The foundation has struggled to protect the wetlands that are now mostly covered in concrete buildings, said Güven Eken, chairman of the Doğa Foundation. In 2004 the foundation won the case with the court decision to keep the protected area a whole and stop construction of the housing project.



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The Gediz Delta is no longer a construction site; it has an official management plan prepared by Doğa Foundation and Ministry of Forestry and Environment. One of the biggest supporters of the project is the local administration of İzmir.

"Somebody had to keep this delta alive and we decided to encourage all İzmir municipalities to take a step toward saving it," said Sasalı Mayor Veli Kasap.

The municipalities came together and established the İzmir Bird Paradise Protection and Developing Association, or İZKUŞ.

"People work collectively to save and develop the delta now. More importantly there is a local administration, İZKUŞ, that was established to protect it," Eken said.

İZKUŞ, founded in 2002 by members of the municipal council, is managed by Nurgül Uçar, who is also the mayor of İzmir's Seyrek district.

"This place cannot be saved by restrictions or imposing bans," Uçar said. "So İZKUŞ started cooperating with locals because they are the ones who know the land best."

The locals, mostly hunters, fishermen and farmers, learned to share the water with the birds and now they know that they should protect the important land for a sustainable environment and for future lives, Uçar said.

İZKUŞ also prepared tourism projects for the Gediz Delta with Doğa Foundation and reinforced locals to create an income by producing goods. They opened workshops for housewives to learn wood painting, copper working, beauty treatment and English.

Housewives who used to sit at home are now being employed and their husbands are supporting their contributions to the household income.

"Life is teamwork," Uçar said, adding that the locals remembered how to produce and share with the help of this project. "The point of view we have now can change the administrations and government in Turkey."

Each contributor has a hard task to promote the bird preserve. Ben and Jerry's participation in this is preparing catalogs and selling the souvenirs made by women in the ice cream shops, and financial support.

"Even people in İzmir don't know that there is a bird paradise inside their own city. It is now time for us to start the main action for the project and promote it in the international arena," said Doğa Foundation Chairman Eker.

The delta is also a big contributor to Turkey's economy with annual production of nearly 500,000 tons of salt.



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Key link in ecological cycles

Businesspeople, members of government and environmentalists gather in the popular holiday district in Muğla for World Wetlands Day to discuss the future of the natural environment in the region, emphasizing on the protection of the wetlands.

Experts called for the protection of the wetlands in Bodrum, saying that they have important contributions to ecology, tourism and economy.

Businesspeople, members of government and environmentalists gathered in the popular holiday district in Muğla for World Wetlands Day to discuss the future of the natural environment in the region.

The Chambers Union of the Turkish Architects and Engineers, the Bodrum Coordination Board, Chamber of Sea Trade and Blue Road Bodrum held a panel at the Bodrum Chamber of Commerce attended by close to 50 environmentalists.

"There is an urgent need to take the necessary precautions to protect the wetlands of the world which face danger because of drought," said Professor Alpay Tırıl, director of Sinop University's Gerze Vocational High School. "Of great importance to the ecological and natural habitat, wetlands will seriously affect human life if they are left to vanish."

Tırıl added that wetlands have an undeniably high importance in economy. "Wetlands are the places where the most natural flora exist in addition to being the center of the water supply on earth," explained Tırıl. "They also have a significant economic value. The destruction of wetlands takes away the means of life for many, results in a loss of soil and undermines tourism. We will not be able to find any land to walk on if people keep going after more and more profit."

Environmentalists said wetlands were the most important link in ecological circles and if any intervention was made to the circle, it would break.

Many wetlands, including Sultan Lake, Seyfe Lake, Ereğli Lake, Eşmekaya Lake and Akşehir Lake are now all dried up. Central Anatolia, therefore, has been going through a desertification process for some time. Wetlands also constitute one of the most important aspects in the prevention of global warming. In a joint statement made by the environmentalists, it was emphasized that ecologic circles were seriously harmed. "Wetlands are not protected enough," said the statement. "So the most important factor to battle against the global warming is being defunct. Areas near the wetlands lose a great deal of productivity, seriously harming the ecology in the region."

Source: www.hurriyetdailynews.com