

UK energy

This unseasonal cold weather has placed more strains on the UK electricity supply. Yesterday we were importing substantial volumes from France and the Netherlands, needing coal to generate 18.7% of our demand, and finding it difficult to get enough from renewables. Gas fired stations still provided the single biggest volumes at 37.3% of the total.

The EU is quite dependent on Russian gas. Fortunately the UK is not so dependent. 43% of our gas comes from our own fields, and it should be possible to increase that volume with the right policies. The largest source of UK imported gas is Norway, with significant quantities also coming in by tanker from places outside the EU like Qatar. It is the imported gas from the continent that does contain some Russian gas, where the continental system needs decent volumes of Russian gas to keep the whole system with sufficient pressure and volume to meet demand.

The threats to energy security that we sometimes hear in world arguments reinforces the case for the UK to look to greater energy independence. It will also help our large balance of payments deficit if we seek to supply more of our own gas and electricity. The UK has increasingly linked itself into the EU system of energy markets. In doing so the UK has reduced its margins of capacity, cutting the amount of reserve electricity capacity it has, and removing an important part of its gas storage system. This has increased our import dependence and cut the resilience of our system

Closure of the remaining coal stations would seem unwise before we have put in place more reserve capacity that can function on cold days when there is little wind and sun to power the main renewables. Putting in place more gas storage would be wise, as would developing more local supplies. Relying on EU imports when they in turn rely more heavily on Russian gas does not look like a great policy.