

# The politics of gas

Continental Europe is very short of gas. It now needs to secure more of it. It has decided that gas is after all a green fuel. Natural gas is for the transition to net zero, and hydrogen gas is to follow down the pipes in due course.

The UK relies heavily on natural gas for heating homes and buildings, for powering heat processes in factories and for electricity generation. Successive UK governments this century have accelerated the decline of the North Sea and declined to find ways to extract onshore gas, preferring to make us import dependent on Norway and Qatar. It is good they have not committed us to too much continental gas. The overriding priority now must be to increase domestic gas production and to steer clear of links to a gas starved continent becoming increasingly dependent on Mr Putin.

The instability of the continental position has just got worse. Hungary has signed a new contract with Russia to import large quantities of Russian gas which will now be delivered through a pipeline that does not cross Ukraine. This replaces use of the Ukraine pipe system. Mr Putin is keen to reduce his dependence on the Ukraine pipe for export to the EU, as he wants no hostage to his policy freedom over Ukraine. He is keen to sign a deal with Germany to use Nord Stream 2, a new pipe from Russia to Germany across the Baltic, to replace the current flows through the Ukraine pipe. If he could eliminate Russian exports via Ukraine he would weaken Ukraine which has been enjoying substantial transit revenues from the gas.

The USA under Mr Trump warned Germany not to sign up to more Russian gas and not sign up to NordStream2, seeing it as a substantial strategic weakness. Mr Biden cancelled the Trump proposals for sanctions were the piped gas to go ahead, but has now had second thoughts and is unhappy about the impact NordStream 2 gas will have on the strategic balance with Russia.

Yesterday we read that the UK as part of the NATO effort was flying defensive anti tank weapons to Ukraine but deviated away from Germany territory to do so. The UK needs to strengthen our home position and not get drawn into disputes on the far side of the EU's territory. The EU has to get smarter at handling Putin's gas based diplomacy. It needs a workable plan for Ukraine. 7 years after Russia took Crimea the EU still rules out a military solution, given the consequences of such an action. It needs a workable solution for the rest of Ukraine which also avoids a war.

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## Asking the Culture Secretary about

# decriminalising non-payment of the BBC licence fee

**Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee to take the pressure off magistrates courts? Should this not be a household bill like any other?

**Nadine Dorries (The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport):** That is something we are keeping under review. In today's age, should we really continue with a licence fee paid by individuals with the potential threat of bailiffs or criminal prosecution? That is an important question and it will be part of the discussion.

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## The future of the BBC

A couple of tweets by the Culture Secretary does not create a new policy. It appears for the next few years the Licence Fee remains, though for a couple of years it may not increase. What she has done is invite those interested to debate the future financing of this important national institution.

The Licence fee is becoming increasingly difficult to collect as many people turn to social media and commercial entertainment and news services which they say they can legally access without paying the Licence fee. The Fee is also resented by more people who are paying for access to non BBC service but still have to pay the tax because of the way they watch other services. The BBC continues to antagonise people who legally do not need to pay with their intimidating emails and messages demanding payment.

One of the reasons BBC support is dropping is the attitudes and content of much BBC output. Although the BBC sought to be impartial over the formal period of the EU referendum. for the rest of the time before and after , it is remorselessly pro EU putting the EU case against the UK and refusing to treat the EU to critical pieces on its policies and on its ways of arriving at them in the way it does for any UK government. It campaigns relentlessly for net zero policies, weaving them into the fabric of many of its programmes, and favours the experts of world organisations however wrong they turn out to be. It plays up Scottish and Welsh identity but refuses similar treatment for England.

It also has some great back catalogue material, employs some talented and interesting people and produces some good programmes. If it wishes to re establish itself as the accepted voices of the UK it needs to become the people's BBC. I suggest that the government should now move to decriminalise the licence fee, making it a bill like other household bills. Enforcement

occupies too much time and resource in magistrates courts. The BBC should also be told to offer the same level of support and service to England that it shows to Scotland by having BBC Scotland.

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## The continuing shortage of wind on some days means there is an urgent need to change energy policy

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, how much additional carbon dioxide is generated by importing and burning LNG compared to using more natural gas delivered by pipeline from UK fields. (96748)

Tabled on: 04 January 2022

**Answer:**

**Greg Hands:**

The Oil and Gas Association published analysis in May 2020, comparing the carbon intensity of United Kingdom Continental Shelf gas with imported liquified natural gas and pipelined gas:

<https://www.ogauthority.co.uk/the-move-to-net-zero/net-zero-benchmarking-and-analysis/natural-gas-carbon-footprint-analysis/>.

This analysis shows that gas extracted from the United Kingdom Continental Shelf has an average emission intensity of 22 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e/boe; whereas imported liquified natural gas has a significantly higher average intensity of 59 kgCO<sub>2</sub>e/boe. The process of liquefaction, combined with the emissions produced by the transportation and regasification of the liquified natural gas once in the United Kingdom, is responsible for the higher emissions intensity.

The answer was submitted on 12 Jan 2022 at 16:57.

**Question:**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what his policy is on the required minimum level of oil stocks for national resilience. (96749)

Tabled on: 04 January 2022

**Answer:**

**Greg Hands:**

Emergency oil stocks are a critical tool to defend against the harmful impacts of major disruptions to global oil supply. The UK holds emergency

stocks of oil, primarily to release in a co-ordinated fashion with other members to the international market in the event of such major supply disruption. As a member of the International Energy Agency the UK is obligated to hold a minimum of 90 days of net imports. This obligation is passed on to companies that supply more than 50 thousand tonnes of key fuels to the UK market in a twelve-month period.

The answer was submitted on 12 Jan 2022 at 16:12.

These two answers illustrate different features of the unsatisfactory energy policy pursued by the UK government. The government is still failing to licence the output of more gas from the UK North Sea, even though on their own figures for carbon dioxide output it would be hugely beneficial on this ground alone to substitute more UK natural gas for imported LNG. As officials and the Regulator seem to regard cutting CO<sub>2</sub> as the main requirement, often ignoring the need to maintain a secure supply and to keep prices down they should deduce from their own figures that they must substitute UK natural gas for imported LNG on green grounds alone. Price, security of supply, availability and the jobs, tax revenues and incomes UK gas would generate also are potent arguments for more UK gas. Ministers have said they want this, so where are the new permits and where is the policy of encouragement to operators in the UK North Sea?

The government adopts the minimum standard for oil reserves and leaves that to the private sector, meaning the stocks are not held in a UK strategic reserve here at home as some other countries do. The derisory level of gas stocks is a wanton disregard for national security.

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## The Prime Minister and Brexit

There can be little doubt that Boris Johnson became Leader of the Conservative party and went on to win a substantial General election victory to get Brexit done. He replaced Theresa May whose civil servants negotiated the UK into a very weak position creating a Brexit that looked like membership without the seat around the table. She left office owing to the Parliamentary pressures. The Opposition worked with Remain forces inside government to create a Brexit in name only leading to enough Conservative MPs wanting her to resign to uphold the result of the referendum.

Two years on from his victory at the polls, and one year on from getting the UK out of the EU formally, the Brexit voting public wants him to use the freedoms the UK has now regained to make us a more prosperous, independent, well respected country with global reach and more domestic activity. Many people are pleased the UK did use its freedom to stay out of the EU vaccine policy, leading to the early development and deployment of a successful UK vaccine. We want more examples of how we can do better for ourselves and the wider world by nurturing talent and trusting policy makers and inventors at

home.

My advice to the Prime Minister is to rebuild lost voting support by enjoying some Brexit wins. This should begin with energy policy. We should detach from more and more dependence on energy short Europe, linking our fortunes to a continent that relies on Russian gas and too many windfarms. The UK needs to extract more of our own gas and oil pending the investment in reliable renewable power , perhaps through pump storage and hydro, perhaps through green hydrogen from windfarms when they are working.

It should continue with banning large supertrawlers from the continent and rebuilding a UK fishing industry with proper regard for our fish stocks. It should include growing more of our own food with suitable support for farmers. It should entail remodelling VAT, taking it off green products and energy. He needs urgently to reassert control, unilaterally if necessary ,over GB/NI trade.

He will lose his core supporters and more of his Brexit voters if he does not return to this unfinished agenda.