

NATURAL GAS BALANCE: A FUTURE OVERSUPPLY? INTEGRATING GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN CASE

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Overview

Recent important discoveries in natural gas worldwide have confirmed the key role that technology plays. From African off shore to Far East new important reserves have been discovered. The US unconventional gas added a strategic unexpected supply. On the other side, the consumption in Europe is tapping, China is not the running economy that used to be and even USA give signals of not extremely positive trend in economic (energy) growth (consumption). The question arise: should we expect a gas bubble in the next future?

To answer to the question we should analyse the supply perspectives and the demand patterns. The geopolitical context plays and will play an important role in the definition of natural gas balance, including the LNG.

An interesting case to analyse is the Mediterranean gas supply (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Cyprus) and the geopolitical conditions that could depict a scenario of oversupply or not. Concerning the peculiar structure of the natural gas industry, we will account for the gas infrastructures frame in order to make evidence of obstacles to the security of supply.

The paper is organised as follows: The introduction depict the framework that encompass the issue we investigate. A literature review allows to better define the state of the art concerning the energy consumption structure and the variables that better describe the consumption paths. Further we introduce the geopolitical context to make evidence of the reasons that could exacerbate or mitigate the gas consumption scenarios.

The conventional forecasts will be integrated with the geopolitical variables that revealed to be more significant. The conclusions will reveal the complexity of the integration of geopolitical analysis into the gas consumption scenarios.

Methods

Regarding the methodology, this paper combines qualitative and quantitative method; and employs geopolitical analysis in its explanatory framework. Beside the literature study, qualitative methods is necessary in order to understand and snapshot the general trends in the natural gas market. As primary source, this paper uses the official documents and statistical data of IEA/EIA/governments, statements of statesmen and official representatives of companies and/or organizations, information of official websites of international organizations/national energy ministries. In addition, secondary sources are used in this paper such as articles in newspapers, scholarly journals and book reviews.

Results

Data analysis consents to define traditional and conventional scenarios to define the gas consumption paths. The paper ambition is to extend the analysis to the geopolitical context: this because this variable play a significant role in favouring or reduce opportunities of gas consumption. An analysis that:

- focus on the role that traditional and new actors play in the Mediterranean gas market
- matched with their geopolitical interests

offers a more consistent vision of the problems and a more realistic evaluation

Conclusions

Through the years, the energy market is becoming more competitive since new environmental friendly technologies such as solar and batteries, are becoming cheaper and then more attractive. However, according to BP Energy outlook for 2017, oil and gas will retain the major share of the global energy supply out to 2035, but the balances will change since the half of the additional energy required will be provided by renewable, nuclear and hydroelectric power. In order natural gas to survive and become world's most important source in the upcoming years, actors in the market should cooperate for the financing of new infrastructure projects, including also traders and private financiers.

As natural gas market becoming more flexible, competition between actors peaks since they struggle to secure contracts. In Europe, due to the high flexibility of its gas system and well-developed spot markets, intense competition will develop among actors in order to have access to the European markets or retain their market share. The previous years there was a clear indexation between oil and gas prices, however we can observe a decoupling. In the future we can expect that although oil prices will most probable stay flat or increase, the gas prices will go down due to oversupply and competition pressure.

The combined natural gas reserves of Israel, Cyprus, Algeria and Egypt advocate the creation of a natural gas hub in the Mediterranean, that could su. For the creation of such a gas hub in the region, a robust interconnection system, LNG terminals and storage facilities must exist. But considering the capital intensity of such infrastructure projects, the current pricing and the political dynamics in the region create serious challenges for such immense investments. Therefore, countries should engage diplomatically and cooperate towards the creation of the appropriate infrastructure.