

4.10.2022

# Hard winter could add to energy fears in Europe

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Governments across Europe already facing the challenge of how to deal with the energy supply crisis this winter have been dealt another blow after the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) said signs pointed to a period of high pressure across western Europe in November and December, which is likely to result in cold conditions with reduced wind and rain, increasing demand for fuel, and restricting the productivity of renewable power sources.

The forecast is based on ECMWF data and also input from weather monitoring services in Japan, the United Kingdom and United States, and the bureau's director-general Florence Rabier told the Financial Times it would make an already challenging period more difficult.

"If we have this pattern then for the energy it is quite demanding because not only is it a bit colder but also you have less wind for wind power and less precipitation for hydro power," she said.

The latest seasonal challenge comes after one of Europe's driest summers on record, and with countries having already spent time trying to reduce their dependency on Russian energy sources, because of the conflict in Ukraine, many have already been forced to find new answers.

"The summer drought has reduced the water levels in rivers and lakes, which weakens hydroelectric power in neighboring countries and also makes it difficult for us to transport coal to the power plants that we have to use due to the tight gas situation," said Robert Habeck, Germany's federal economics and climate protection minister.

Some nuclear power plants that were due to be shut down are now being kept open for longer as a back-up resource, and Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the country had taken effective anticipatory steps to deal with the challenge.

"We can say we will probably get through this winter, despite all the tensions, with the preparations we have made," he said. "No one could have said that three, four, five months ago, or at the beginning of this year."

"Because we started so early ... we are now in a position in which we can go bravely and courageously into this winter, in which our country will withstand this," he added.

International consultancy Wood Mackenzie said if this winter is in line with the five-year average, Europe could get through it with around one-quarter of its gas storage capacity remaining, and if Russia were to go stop all supplies, the European Union would be down to around 15 percent of storage capacity left by winter's end. "Perhaps the biggest risk is an extreme situation," said Kateryna Filippenko, a gas markets analyst with the company.

But Aslak Berg, an economist and former adviser to the European Free Trade Association and the Norwegian government, told the Politico website that although Russia's constriction of Europe's gas supply had taken its toll, it was a threat that could only be carried out once.

"It's causing pain now — but the effect lessens with time," he said.