

Italy's Assocarboni targets 20% stake for coal

Italy, which relies on natural gas to generate more than 60% of its electricity, should increase its use of coal to boost economic competitiveness and increase energy security, the president of the Italian association of coal operators Assocarboni said Tuesday.

While Italy is the second-largest manufacturing country in Europe, its companies pay between 30% and 50% more for electricity than their European partners, Andrea Clavarino said in an interview.

Clavarino said a strong dependence on gas imports and the lack of nuclear power demonstrate weaknesses in the country's energy mix.

With nuclear power "out of the game" and renewable energy still too expensive, Italy should boost the use of coal to overcome a situation that challenges the security of the country's power supply and undermines its competitiveness, Clavarino added.

Italy's current fuel mix relies for more than 60% on natural gas, imported especially from Algeria and Russia, 8% on oil, 12% on coal, and 20% on renewable sources of energy.

"A more balanced energy mix for Italy should rely for 60% on natural gas, as we cannot avoid this, 20% on coal, and 20% on renewable energy sources," Clavarino said.

Clavarino highlighted that Italy's coal plants are among the most efficient in Europe, with an efficiency of 40% compared with a European average of 35%.

"Torrevaldaliga and Vado Ligure coal plants have reached an efficiency rate of 46% and are among the most innovative plants in Europe, a level that only Japanese and Danish coal plants can match," he said.

In addition, he said the conversion of Enel's oil-fired 1,900-MW plant in Porto Tolle to coal equipped with carbon capture and storage technology, and the construction of high-efficiency coal-fired plants in Vado Ligure and Saline Joniche can play an important role in boosting the use of coal and the security of the country's power supply.

Clavarino that while he believes it is crucial for Italy to adopt a new strategic energy plan, the government "has other priorities" in dealing with the economic crisis.

He said renewable energy resources are still too costly and may not be affordable under what is likely to be more austere government budgets.

Assocarboni has more than 90 member companies and is the only Italian association representing the entire coal chain from coal mining groups to electricity and steel producers, other manufacturers and shipping firms. — *Daniela Coiro*