

'Energy policy is non-existent'

Technnical Chamber says lack of a plan leads to high consumption and bills, and slammed 'ad-hoc' approach to gas

By Alexis Pantelides

OVER eighty per cent of buildings in Cyprus lack any sort of insulation and are bereft of suitable heating and air conditioning systems, the chairman of the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber (ETEK), Stelios Achnotis said yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference to present the chamber's priorities and suggestions for the next three years, Achnotis credited the inexistence of any state policy regarding energy conservation as a key factor behind bloated electricity bills.

Suggestions, among others, included the modernisation of public administration, a wholesale shift towards "green energies" and solutions to the pressing issues of unemployment and the shrinking construction market.

"The minimal installation of insulation in our buildings coupled with the rising demand for better living and work conditions have led to the problem of high energy consumption and consequently high bills" Achnotis said.

Eurostat revealed last week that Cypriot households paid the highest average electricity price among EU members in 2011 - 0.1731 Euros per kilowatt-hour - and the second highest price in 2010.

The chamber's new

board, which was voted in last June, said that there was a distinctive absence of a comprehensive, substantiated national strategy concerning energy as a whole.

"This has led to repeated shortcomings and deviations from long-term goals concerning the use of renewable energy sources (RES) which drag us even farther behind fulfilling our EU commitments for 2020" ETEK's deputy chairman, Constantinos Constanti said.

In line with EU targets, Cyprus has vowed to cover 20 per cent of its energy needs from RES by 2020.

Eurostat statistics dating back to 2009 reveal that at the time, Cyprus covered only about 0.7 per cent of its electricity consumption from RES.

While two wind farms set up during the past two years in Paphos and Limassol are expected to increase the percentage, ETEK claims that the EU target could only be achieved by a well-organised strategy.

ETEK also voiced its concern over apparent "ad-hoc decisions" taken concerning the newly found natural gas in Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

"Legislation concerning the digging up, exploitation and management of the island's mineral wealth is still not in place, while decisions are being taken without the necessary backing by objective studies" Achnotis said.

Political parties are currently at loggerheads over how many responsibilities will be bestowed onto the Natural Gas Public Company (DEFA), with different amendments concerning the relevant law being investigated in parliament.

The chamber called for the creation of an energy strategy council, an institutionalised advisory body concerning the management of natural gas findings and a state-owned natural gas company.

Achnotis however was quick to clarify that the council would not at any point substitute existing bodies handling the natural gas issue - including the independent Energy Regulatory Authority (CERA), DEFA and the commerce ministry's energy service - but would facilitate their cooperation, backed by empirical and substantiated objective studies.

"Through our role as the institutionalised technical advisor of the state, we believe that we can help in substantiating a comprehensive national policy concerning energy; including the issue of natural gas" ETEK general secretary Costas Alayiotis said.

ETEK boasts around 10,000 members including architects, electrical, mechanical and chemical engineers among others and is in charge of handing out professional permits for all of the professions concerned.