

ADR Assembly 28-29 September 2021
“COVID 19 crisis impact on energy consumers and their request for ADR”
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Description: The increase of complaints regarding invoices in 2021 mainly due to payment difficulties, growing awareness about energy savings and energy transition are some of the consequences of COVID-19 on energy consumers. In the meantime, ADRs are receiving more complex and new cases related to services, electric mobility, energy saving bonuses, renewable energy self-production/consumption, etc...Mediation is particularly appropriate to address such disputes.

KEY MESSAGES

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about ADR in the energy sector, especially in the context of sanitary crisis we all know, and to speak about the way ADR contributes to a better consumer-driven energy market.

- I –What have been the consequences of COVID – 19 crisis on energy consumers?
 - With the economic crisis, consequence of the pandemic, more people (young people, precarious workers) have had difficulties to pay their energy bills (25% more having unpaid bills). The profile of vulnerable customers has changed. At the same time, small companies which have suffered material revenues drop because their activities have been disrupted, were led to dispute their energy bills.

- With the pandemic, consumers have been increasingly concerned about their energy consumption. Indeed, for economic reason but also because of the general trend for energy saving, more and more people want to manage their energy consumption. They spent more time at home and feel more concerned by energy issue. Today the consumer has the tools to manage his energy consumption, through smart meters for example but not only.

- II – What are the consequences on the disputes?
 - An increase of complaints, especially in 2021, regarding energy bills, but not in the same proportion as in other sectors such as transport or travels. Indeed payment difficulties has been largely addressed by :
 - Various social governmental measures by the member States such as prohibition of power cut for unpaid bills, or prohibition to recover unpaid debts,
 - Energy Operators were also encouraged to propose differed payments to their clients, in particular the small companies

- With the growing awareness about energy savings and energy transition, consumers are more and more active players in energy sector. For example, people are now able to produce, to sell or to consume their own energy. They are offered new services in relation to energy efficiency or energy performance in buildings, electric mobility and so on ...

Therefore, new contractual relationships between consumers and energy companies are developing. Inevitably, new sources of dispute are emerging, more complex and consumers need independent, fast and free access to amicable dispute resolution, among which mediation is particularly appropriate.

The mediators, thanks to their background, are able to adapt quickly to new topics in relation to clean energy transition, able to imagine specific solutions addressing disputes. Actually, mediators already handle cases related to new topics such as electric mobility, renewable energy self-production/consumption and many other topics.

For these reasons, I believe that ADR contributes to a better consumer-driven energy market by offering these new players the assurance they will find someone listening to them and able to solve the issues quickly and free of charge for them.