Position Paper on Improving Permitting Procedures

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energy storage europe association

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Executive Summary

Permitting procedures for energy storage projects across the EU remain complex, fragmented, and lengthy. These delays risk undermining Europe's ability to meet its 2030 decarbonisation targets and to integrate the growing share of renewable energy into the electricity system.

Key findings and recommendations:

- **Introduce a time-limit for permitting**: Introduce binding, technology-neutral maximum time limits for permitting energy storage projects (12 months in acceleration areas, 24 months elsewhere) with the objective of accelerating permitting timelines.
- **Ensure equal treatment of technologies**: Revise national frameworks to apply consistent, non-discriminatory permitting procedures across all storage technologies, with no unjustified preference for individual solutions.
- **Strengthen institutional capacity**: Equip national permitting authorities with the technical knowledge and resources to assess storage projects efficiently, including aspects such as fire safety and land compatibility.
- **Clarify environmental assessments**: Ensure that storage projects are only subject to full Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) when proportionate environmental risks exist (e.g. large land or water use, biodiversity impacts, or chemical/fire hazards).
- **Increase transparency and digitalisation**: Develop an EU-wide permitting platform to streamline procedures, and provide regular reporting on permitting durations.

A harmonised and streamlined approach to permitting will unlock the necessary investments for approximately 200 GW of energy storage by 2030,[1] supporting the EU's energy security and climate objectives.

This paper does not advocate for the reopening of EU legislative files. However, should such files be revised in the future, the review should take into consideration the recommendations presented here.

[1] https://energystorageeurope.eu/publication/energy-storage-targets-2030-and-2050/

Focus: The Questions This Paper Aims to Answer

1. Which existing EU directives and regulations — such as RED III, Electricity Directive (EU) 2019/944 and the TEN-E Regulation — shall be revised or clarified in the future to better streamline permitting procedures for energy storage projects across Member States?
2. How can EU-level digitalisation, transparency, and standardisation initiatives reduce permitting complexity and improve cross-border coordination for storage projects?
3. What mechanisms can the EU use — beyond legislation — to strengthen Member States' permitting capacity and ensure consistent, proportionate treatment of all storage technologies?

Context: Without Accelerating Permitting Europe Will Fail to Decarbonise

Long permitting procedures. According to the European Commission, in some Member States, the entire permit-granting process for large renewable energy projects can take up to 9 years.

Transposition of legislative actions. Legislative frameworks such as the Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) and the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) aim to accelerate permitting, however their implementation varies across Member States, with many not fully transposing these provisions into national law or experiencing limited effectiveness.

Failure to build flexibility. Energy storage facilities are essential for enhancing grid flexibility, reducing congestion, and maximising the utilisation of renewable energy sources. Delays in permitting these projects not only hinder the integration of renewables but also jeopardise the EU's ability to meet its decarbonisation targets.

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1. Accelerate Permitting Procedures

The deployment of energy storage projects in the EU is hindered by complex and protracted permitting procedures, which vary significantly across Member States and often delay critical infrastructure development. These inconsistencies create bottlenecks, with some projects facing permitting timelines exceeding several years. The lack of harmonised frameworks, coupled with regulatory barriers such as double grid charges and unclear ownership rules, along with lack of skilled workforce in the permitting authorities (at national, regional and local level) complicates the rollout of diverse storage technologies.

1.1 Complex and Lengthy Permitting Procedures

A key challenge is the uneven application of accelerated permitting frameworks, which often prioritise Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESSs) while sidelining other technologies like compressed air, thermal or long-duration energy storage, leading to disparities in deployment timelines.

The European Commission's 2023 Recommendation on Energy Storage emphasises the need for streamlined permitting to enhance system flexibility, yet many Member States have not aligned their legislative frameworks with these guidelines, resulting in prolonged environmental assessments and legal uncertainties. The Renewable Energy Directive (RED III) introduces provisions for exemptions from certain environmental assessments in designated "Renewables Acceleration Zones," but these are not consistently applied to all storage technologies, further delaying non-BESS projects. Furthermore, permit interdependencies create deadlocks: in several Member States, environmental approvals or market pre-qualification cannot proceed without prior grid access/connection, freezing projects and delaying final investment decisions.

- **Member State legislative frameworks should align energy storage projects' permitting deadlines with renewables. A 12-24 month target for permitting is a suitable reference point.**
  - The EU should revise Directive (EU) 2023/2413 (RED III) to introduce binding, technology-neutral maximum permit-granting durations for stand-alone energy storage facilities (e.g., 12 months in designated acceleration areas and 24 months elsewhere).

- **As stipulated in the European Commission's communication on the establishment of areas for grid and storage infrastructure, the designation of energy storage acceleration areas can expedite new storage projects. Furthermore, the RED III stipulates that only co-located storage projects in these areas benefit from exemptions from certain environmental assessments, thus having shorter permitting and deployment times.**
  - The EU should amend Directive (EU) 2023/2413 (RED III) to create "Acceleration Areas for Energy Storage" beyond co-located storage, with simplified assessments, fixed time limits, and a one-stop shop[2].
  - The EU should implement the EU Action Plan for Grids (COM(2023) 757) by introducing, through an appropriate legislative basis (e.g. RED III or the Electricity Regulation), a requirement for Member States to identify and publish grid and storage acceleration areas aligned with network development plans, ensuring spatial coherence with renewables acceleration areas.

[2] A "one-stop shop" is a single administrative body that coordinates and issues all required permits for a project, reducing complexity and avoiding parallel procedures across multiple authorities.

- **In some Member States accelerated permitting procedures target Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESSs) specifically, while other technologies, e. g., compressed air and long-duration storage technologies have longer procedures.**
    - The EU should revise Directive (EU) 2023/2413 (RED III) to include a technology-neutral non-discrimination clause for permitting of energy storage technologies, prohibiting preferential or exclusionary treatment unless justified by proportionate, evidence-based environmental or safety criteria.

Country example
Fast-track permitting process in Italy In Italy, lithium-ion battery projects benefit from a fast-track permitting process that can take projects from concept to ready-to-build in just a few months. This approach has proven highly effective, enabling over 2.1 GW of new lithium-ion capacity to move forward in 2024 alone. It demonstrates how streamlined regulation can accelerate the deployment of strategic energy infrastructure. However, this regulatory advantage has also created an unlevel playing field. Other technologies—such as Long-Duration Energy Storage (LDES)—had to navigate longer, more complex permitting procedures, despite posing no safety or environmental risks. For LDES, the permitting process had no clear path to follow. However, an Energy Storage Europe Association member, working closely with the Italian Authorities, and the Sardinia Region, established a dialogue to find the right approach for permitting for innovative LDES technologies, including CO2 storage. The Italian Authorities carried out detailed reviews of environmental and safety aspects. Since the CO2 Battery poses no significant risks, the project was ultimately authorized by treating it in line with how a BESS installation would be handled in Italy. **Permitting challenge in Belgium** In Belgium, permitting procedures for energy storage projects face several unique barriers that create uncertainty and delay. A key issue is the default rejection mechanism: if permitting authorities miss the legally prescribed response deadline, projects are automatically rejected. This forces developers into lengthy appeal processes even when the delays stem from minor administrative issues. Introducing a system where net-zero technologies receive deemed approval in such cases would prevent unnecessary litigation and accelerate deployment. Another obstacle is the lack of clear land-use rules for storage installations. Developers frequently encounter rejections when proposing projects in industrial or utility zones, often based on subjective criteria such as perceived job creation, noise, or visual impact. To avoid inconsistent treatment, EU guidance should clarify that storage facilities are permissible in industrial, economic, and utility zones, provided technical standards are met. Finally, conflicting safety requirements between fire brigades and industrial risk authorities often lead to disproportionate demands, such as requiring additional fire pools or redundant suppression systems. These inconsistent rules increase costs without improving safety.

1.2 Strengthen Institutional Capacity

The permitting process for energy storage projects in the EU is often slow and inconsistent due to a lack of specialised expertise among national, regional and local agency staff, particularly in assessing the technical and safety requirements of various energy storage technologies. Staff frequently lack the training needed to evaluate aspects like land compatibility and fire risk management. This knowledge gap, as noted in the European Commission's 2023 Recommendation on Energy Storage, results in prolonged and uneven permitting timelines across Member States. These delays hinder the deployment of critical infrastructure needed to achieve Energy Storage Europe's 2030 projection of 200 GW of energy storage capacity in the EU — a figure also acknowledged by the European Commission, which anticipates a substantial increase in storage installations across Member States.

- **National Agencies (as well as regional and local parties) involved in permitting of renewable projects connecting to the grid need to provide further capacity training for staff to permit all different energy storage technology projects.**
    - Member States should leverage the EU funded Technical Support Instrument (TSI) to provide targeted training and capacity-building programs for regulatory authorities and permitting bodies.

- **It is important to provide training for Member States' permitting staff dealing with land compatibility aspects and fire-risk/fire-plan, taking into account the Energy Storage Europe's Guidelines on Safety Best Practices for Battery Energy Storage Systems.**
    - The European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC) should develop harmonised guidance/standards on BESS siting, land-use interfaces, and large-scale fire testing taking into account the Energy Storage Europe Guidelines on Safety Best Practices for Battery Energy Storage Systems.

Country example
Regulatory framework for Industrial Decarbonisation in Spain: Law 21/2013 Law 21/2013 on Environmental Assessment in Spain simplifies the administrative process for certain industrial installations aimed at producing electricity, steam, and hot water, which may benefit from a simplified permitting process. Specifically, Annex II, Group 4.a) of the law allows facilities with a thermal capacity between 0.5 MW and 50 MW to apply for a simplified environmental licence instead of undergoing the more complex Integrated Environmental Authorisation (Autorización Ambiental Integrada). This streamlined approach reduces bureaucratic burden and accelerates project development timelines, particularly for medium-scale energy projects, making it easier for industries to implement modern technologies without lengthy delays. This regulatory flexibility is a key enabler for industrial electrification and decarbonisation. Companies can replace fossil-fuel systems with electric alternatives powered by clean energy and incorporate thermal energy storage solutions. These systems allow load shifting to periods of lower electricity prices, improving operational flexibility and reducing costs. By facilitating faster adoption of clean technologies and storage, Law 21/2013 supports Spain's broader climate objectives while helping industries remain competitive in a low-carbon economy.

1.3 Increase Digitalisation and Transparency

Developing a pan-European digital platform for energy-storage permitting unlocks accelerated deployment and fosters cross-border cooperation. Experience shows that digitalisation, central access points, and one-stop-shop models significantly reduce permitting delays, as demonstrated in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Serbia. Moreover, the Commission's latest Renewable Energy Directive and TEN-E regulation mandate public permit schedules and coordination among national authorities.

The digital permitting platform can also be used as a knowledge-sharing database for permitting procedures across the Member States. Such a platform can also facilitate the deployment of projects with a cross-border impact and cooperation between multiple Member States.

- **It is key to develop an EU digital platform for energy storage's permitting progresses, including regulatory timelines. This increases transparency regarding project development and projects' future impact on the electricity network.**
    - The EU should add to the Directive (EU) 2019/944 an obligation for NRAs to publish monthly statistics on storage permitting durations by technology within regions, and development of a continuously updated EU-wide permitting map.

1.4 Target Environmental Assessment Procedures

Energy storage projects are critical enablers of the EU's energy transition, facilitating grid stability and the integration of renewable energy to achieve the European Green Deal's climate neutrality goals by 2050. Yet, these projects often face permitting delays linked to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), particularly when procedures are prolonged by subjective or "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) objections. Even where projects are located in appropriate areas and comply with established noise and safety standards, such objections can extend timelines by several years. This lack of harmonised regulatory treatment across Member States increases costs, delays deployment, and undermines the EU's energy transition objectives, necessitating urgent reforms to align energy storage with other critical infrastructure.

- **Storage projects are often automatically subjected to full-scale EIAs despite not being justified by clear and proportionate environmental risks (e.g. large land or water use, impacts on biodiversity, or potential fire/chemical hazards).**
    - The EU should amend Directive 2011/92/EU (the EIA Directive) to clarify that stand-alone or co-located energy storage projects should only be subjected to full Environmental Impact Assessments where proportionate environmental risks exist (e.g. significant land or water use, impacts on protected habitats, or fire/chemical hazards). In other cases, a simplified screening procedure should apply, mirroring the approach foreseen for renewable projects in RED III.

- **For renewable energy projects and industrial decarbonisation transformations that are upgraded to incorporate, repower or refurbish energy storage to form hybrid or co-located systems, additional EIAs are often required beyond the assessments conducted for the original renewable project.**
    - The EU should clarify via Commission Guidance (and encourage transposition) that repowering, refurbishing or adding storage within the existing footprint of a consented renewable project is an upgrade subject only to screening for significant effects and simplified assessments.

- **Neighbourhood objections can at times block projects that already comply with EU and national noise, safety, and land-use standards.**
    - The EU should amend Directive 2011/92/EU (the EIA Directive) to clarify that local opposition alone cannot constitute grounds for requiring a full EIA or for rejecting a project, provided the installation meets all technical and environmental criteria. These projects should not face additional delays or rejections due to "Not In My Backyard" (NIMBY) objections.

2. Conclusion

Energy storage is a cornerstone of Europe's energy transition, enabling flexibility, resilience, integration of renewable energy and decarbonisation of industries in a flexible and competitive manner. Yet, today's fragmented and protracted permitting procedures remain one of the biggest obstacles to accelerating deployment. Unless action is taken now, the EU risks missing its 2030 climate and energy targets.

A clear, harmonised, and streamlined permitting framework for energy storage is essential to unlock the full potential of the EU's renewable energy integration. Storage projects are to be treated as a cornerstone of security of supply, and should be granted with a fast, fair, and future-proof permitting framework.

This paper does not advocate for the reopening of EU legislative files. However, should such files be revised in the future, the review should take into consideration the recommendations presented here.

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About the Energy Storage Europe Association:

The Energy Storage Europe Association is the leading member-supported association representing organisations active across the entire energy storage value chain. The Association supports the deployment of energy storage to further the cost-effective transition to a resilient, carbon-neutral, and secure energy system. Together, Energy Storage Europe Association members have significant expertise across all major storage technologies and applications. This allows us to generate new ideas and policy recommendations that are essential to build a regulatory framework that is supportive of storage.

For more information, please visit www.energystorageeurope.eu

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Disclaimer:

This content was elaborated by the Energy Storage Europe Association and reflects a consolidated view of its members from an energy storage point of view. Individual Energy Storage Europe Association members may adopt different positions on certain topics from their corporate standpoint.

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of Energy Storage