

# Trade union responses to the reconstruction of the Austrian energy sector and the increase of renewable energies in the energy mix

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## INTRODUCTION

The project TRAFOLABOUR is concerned with the role of trade unions in the social-ecological transformation.

During this transformation the way how energy is produced and consumed will play a crucial role. Trade unions as the main representatives of workers' interests have to actively take part in this reorganization. In our working package, we analyze how and in which form trade unions can engage in a transformation of the energy sector and what obstacles exist to formulate more far reaching positions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Our main research questions concerning trade unions and the arising socio-economic challenges are:

- What are the main strategies within the trade unions movement to cope with major political and economic trends in the energy sector?
- What positions are articulated concerning the transformation of the Austrian energy sector?

## METHODS

A broad range of research tools are used, such as:

- gathering and reviewing existing literature
- in-depth analysis of trade union documents such as strategy and working papers, conference proceedings, press releases and newspaper articles
- 17 qualitative expert and problem-focused interviews and group interviews
- institutional and context analysis

Generally, increase of renewable energy is supported

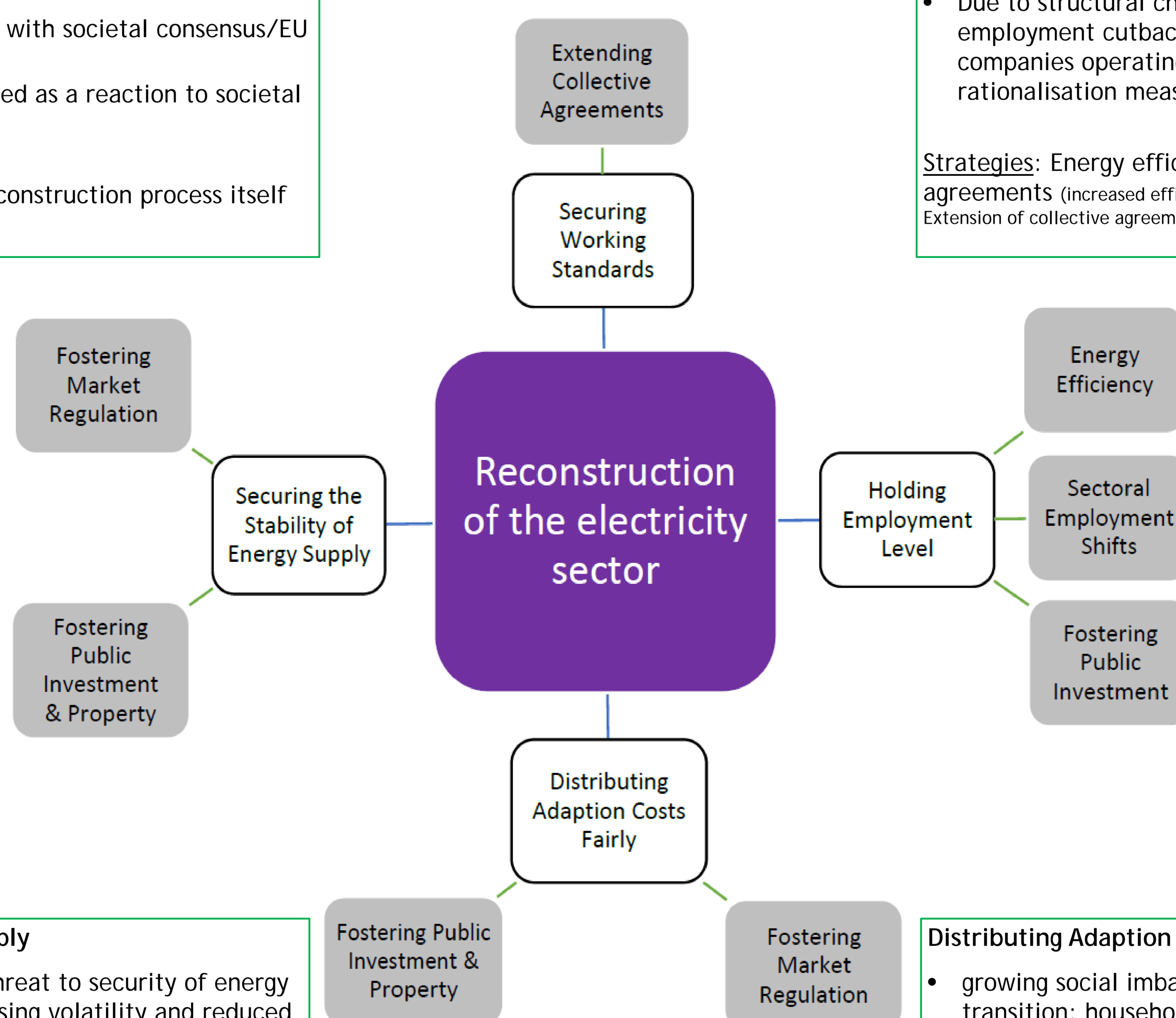
- Trade unions' positions are in line with societal consensus/EU law
- Positions and strategies are adopted as a reaction to societal developments

BUT unions make demands on the reconstruction process itself

Extending Collective Agreements & Holding Employment

- Due to structural change, liberalisation and privatisation: employment cutbacks & falling quality of work (new, private companies operating outside of the collective agreements, rationalisation measures in energy sector)

Strategies: Energy efficiency and extension of collective agreements (increased efficiency leads to weakened needs for structural changes Extension of collective agreements as core strategy)



Securing the Stability of Energy Supply

- on-going energy transition poses threat to security of energy supply (market-solutions lead to rising volatility and reduced system responsibility of participants)
- security of energy supply: in terms of availability for households and also as cheap energy for industry as basic condition for renewed growth

Strategies: foster increased public good provision and market re-regulation (coordinated public strategy instead of market incentives)

Distributing Adaption Costs Fairly

- growing social imbalances also within ongoing energy transition: households and low incomes carry biggest burden
- Energy poverty rising -> energy loses its status as a basic service (current market-based solutions are increasing the burden for the poor)

Strategies: foster increased public good provision and market re-regulation

## CONCLUSIONS

Strong criticism of current development trends and major political decisions (Liberalisation & privatisation, market-based solutions, rising costs for low incomes and increased energy poverty - distributional consequences)

Strong notion of productivist understanding: energy as cheap industrial input & pre-requirement for renewed growth (danger to side for growth-induced policies when it comes to practical implementation)

"Energy as basic service": availability and the role of public property

Technological solutions play considerable role

How can trade unions accompany transformation?

- trade unions act as safeguards for "social justice"
- trade unions act proactively if link between core objectives and positions with environmental issues is strong
- However, in a neoliberal politico-economic environment trade unions are faced with countercurrents over the last decades (tendency to focus on core objectives leaving aside environmental issues owed to self doubts concerning assertiveness)