

Phasing out Russian energy imports must be combined with direct support for EU cities and regions to deliver the Green Deal locally



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Opening the meeting, the Deputy Mayor of Budapest Kata Tüttő (HU/PES), chairwoman of the ENVE commission and of the Green Deal Going Local working group stressed that: “The war in Ukraine has dramatically increased the need for more secure, clean and affordable energy sources, in a world facing a climate emergency. The REPowerEU plan should not only be about phasing out our dependence on Russian fossil fuels, but also a way to speed up the implementation of the European Green Deal and maintain our high climate ambition. We need to empower cities and regions as they are at the frontline of the energy and climate transitions.”

On empowering cities and regions through targeted finance, Nancy Saich, European Investment Bank's chief climate change expert, presented an outline of the Climate Bank roadmap, stressing that “the current energy crisis has accentuated our priority to support projects in three areas: energy efficiency in buildings, renewable energies and energy storage.” The Bank's target to direct 50% of its financing towards climate and sustainability projects by 2025 is combined with a Paris-aligned policy that ensures the other 50% is aligned with the international climate agreement. Specific financing programmes for cities and regions include credit lines for smaller municipalities through framework loans.

Alison Gilliland (IE/PES), Lord Mayor of Dublin and CoR rapporteur of the opinion Towards a structural inclusion of Cities and Regions in UNFCCC COP27, stressed: “ We all want the unjustified war in Ukraine to end but the resultant energy crisis cannot take away the urgency to fight the climate crisis and must not undermine our climate

goals. We must remain as ambitious as before in view of COP27 and the European Green Deal must remain our long-term compass. It is time that massive investments and measures to speed up renewables, energy efficiency and savings, and sustainable alternative fuels are prioritised and fully coupled together. A just energy transition is crucial now more than ever!”

Hanna Zdanowska (PL/EPP), Mayor of Łódź, declared: “ The war in Ukraine should not delay the implementation of the European Green Deal. However, the European Commission and national governments should take into account the enormous financial burdens faced by cities involved in direct humanitarian aid. In Łódź, we have welcomed 120,000 Ukrainian refugees and we rapidly need 20 additional schools and kindergartens. We call on the European Commission and Member States for immediate financial support.”

Members also discussed Trees for Life, the CoR call to action to contribute to the EU’s pledge to plan 3 billion additional trees by 2030. Vincent Chauvet (FR/Renew Europe), Mayor of Autun, said: “Trees for Life needs to reach beyond European capitals. To succeed in Europe's reforestation, we must consider protecting and restoring existing natural habitats and not only ensure the greening of urban areas. We need to invest first in sustainable forest management, to maintain the added value of existing forests and boost forests natural regeneration.”

Bern Voss (DE/Greens), member of the Schleswig-Holstein State Parliament, declared: “ The climate crisis, the war on Ukraine, the rising prices of fossil fuels and the health crisis with its negative effects on supply chains represent the major challenges of today. We must learn to solve these crises together. Shifting to renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy savings make us independent and less vulnerable. These future-proof and cost-effective solutions will also create the basis for the reconstruction of Ukraine.”

János Ádám Karácsony, (HU/ECR), Deputy President of Pest County Council and CoR rapporteur of the opinion on clean air, stressed that: “Following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the EU's approach to climate policy needs to be revised and become multidimensional. We must protect our environment and keep our air clean and ensure that our policies are not only sustainable, but also sensible and do not place unnecessary burdens on citizens and businesses.”

József Kóbor (HU/EA), Member of the local government of Pécs, said: “We are paying a huge price for our dependence on Russian fossil-fuel imports. We need bold actions to protect vulnerable consumers, hard-hit by high energy prices, massively invest in renewables and increase energy efficiency.” The city of Pécs is one of the 100 cities selected to take part in the EU Mission for 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030.

Members discussed DiscoverEU, a programme that combines sustainable mobility and youth policy, with over 160,000 free train passes having already been granted. MEP István Ujhelyi (HU/S&D), Vice-President of the of the European Parliament's TRAN committee, said: “Together with cities, we can make this programme even a bigger success” and called on CoR members to join the DiscoverEU mentorship programme.

In 2021, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and EIB Group renewed and reinforced their long-standing cooperation with the adoption of a new joint Action Plan.

Through Green Deal Going Local, the European Committee of the Regions is committed to supporting cities' and regions in the EU's transition towards climate-neutrality. Green Deal Going Local is a flagship initiative of the European Committee of the Regions that aims at placing cities and regions at the heart of the EU's climate-neutral transition. It includes several calls to action, such as Trees for Life, a survey to collect the views of cities and regions on the challenges and opportunities of implementing the European Green Deal locally, and a call for all local and regional authorities to share their climate commitments.

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