REPowerEU: local and regional energy saving plans are crucial to ensure an affordable green transition and stop the EU's dependency on Russian fossil fuels

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The energy crisis remains a major concern for local and regional leaders across the EU. Therefore, it is crucial to empower regions and cities to strengthen their capacity to build resilient communities in order to limit the EU's dependency on fossil fuels. Decentralised energy production, energy efficiency and saving plans on a local and regional level will ensure the achievement of the REPowerEU plan . Current threats to Europe’s energy security and supply are not an alternative to the climate-neutral transition, local leaders recalled.

The current geopolitical situation after the Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the energy market radically. The energy crisis, caused by the war, however does not change the urgency to fight climate change. The phasing-out of fossil fuels is more important than ever. The REPowerEU plan, which was adopted by the European Commission on 18 May, puts a strong focus on immediate actions on energy efficiency and savings, giving local and regional authorities a major role in this regard, and includes recommendations on speeding up permitting renewable energy projects.

Members of the European Committee of the Regions' (CoR) Commission for Environment, Climate Change and Energy (ENVE) highlighted in their meeting on 31 May that saving energy will be the cleanest and most immediate way to increase independence from Russian energy and underlined that regions and cities should continue to be the leading political bodies in supporting citizens who are mostly

affected by the increasing energy prices. They further emphasised that the independence from Russian energy is just another step towards more sustainable energy in the EU and that environmental problems still remain, especially in rural areas.

Opening the debate on the implications of the war in Ukraine for cities and regions facing the energy crisis, Kata Tüttő (HU/PES), Chair of the ENVE Commission and Deputy Mayor of Budapest, declared: " Sustained high energy prices and the disruption of energy supply caused by the illegal Russia's war in Ukraine are damaging a large part of our economies and exacerbating energy and mobility poverty. The proposals within the REPowerEU plan should be the way to accelerate significantly the clean energy transition, phasing out our dependency on fossil fuels and not only diversifying its supply. We, cities and regions, are at the core of the emergency response in this crisis with a view to increasing renewables, energy sobriety and sufficiency in our communities. We call therefore for a recognition of this role in the REPowerEU plan. "

The CoR has jointly launched with the Covenant of Mayors and the European Commission the " Cities Energy Savings Sprint ", a communications campaign in the form of a toolkit that will help local governments reduce municipal energy consumption and encourage citizens and local business to take similar measures.

Moreover, ENVE Commission's members adopted the following three draft opinions during the meeting:

Ecological transition - Which balance between social acceptability and environmental imperatives to build resilient communities from the point of view of cities and regions , by rapporteur Hannah Zdanoswka (PL/EPP), Mayor of Łódź, who stated: " Diversification and Europe's independence from Russian energy sources is one of the priorities. Ensuring the access to heat and energy sources for everyone, including less well - off, is another one. We must work for energy efficiency and the fastest possible development of renewable energy. Making our cities resilient is a recipe for the survival, competitiveness and attractiveness of our cities and regions for residents and investors ."

Revision of Energy Performance of Buildings Directive by rapporteur André Viola (FR/PES), Member of the Departmental Council of Aude,

who stated: "If we want to lower our energy bills and meet our climate targets by 2050, we need to be ambitious in decarbonizing the EU building stock and truly fighting energy poverty. We need to have a single renovation plan that can be implemented over years, which needs to be inclusive and financially viable. The revision of the directive needs to focus on the entire life cycle of buildings and embed circular economy in all stages. This will happen only if adequate financial and technical resources will be made available to cities and regions. "

Green budget put into practice at local and regional levels , by rapporteur Vincent Chauvet (FR/RE), Mayor of Autun, who declared in the margins of the meeting: " Green budgeting should be a way we all approach our local and regional budgets in the near future to better align our budgetary policies with environmental goals. It can help local governments to prioritise and select low-carbon and resilient investment projects and spending, facilitates and improves the rationality of decisions, contributes to improving the evaluation of public policies and responds to a growing demand of transparency and accountability on subnational government public action. It also raises several challenges for municipalities and regions. This is why they will need a strong support from the European Commission in the definition ‘green budget objectives' at local and regional level, tools, methodologies, performance indicators and a list of budgetary items for local and regional green budgeting. "

Furthermore, ENVE members had a first exchange of views on the following opinions: "Energy package on gas, hydrogen and methane emissions", by rapporteur Jakub Piotr Ch e ł stowski (PL/ECR), Marshal of the Śląskie Voivodeship, and "Towards a structural inclusion of Cities and Regions in UNFCCC COP27", by rapporteur Alison Gilliland (IE/PES), Dublin City Councillor.

The ENVE commission appointed Jean-No ë l Verfaillie (FR/RE), Mayor of Marly, as rapporteur for the opinion on the "Industrial Emissions Directive" and Luca Menesini (IT/PES), President of the Province of Lucca, as rapporteur on the opinion "EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles".

The agenda and other working documents are available through this link .

At the last plenary session, in April 2022, local and regional leaders

adopted a resolution on REPowerEU and a first package of opinions contributing to the ongoing revision of the EU's ‘ Fit for 55 energy package ’ and the implementation of the European Green Deal at the local and regional level.

On 18 May 2022, the European Commission adopted a plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible, starting with gas, in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. REPowerEU seeks to diversify gas supplies, speed up the rollout of renewable gases and replace gas in heating and power generation, which could reduce demand for Russian gas by two thirds before the end of the year.

Through Green Deal Going Local, the European Committee of the Regions is committed to support cities’ and regions in the EU’s transition towards climate-neutrality. Green Deal Going Local is a flagship initiative of the CoR 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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