

Cities and regions must be full partners of the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration



□ In this interview, [Gunārs Ansiņš](#) (LV/Renew Europe) answers four questions on the transition towards a more sustainable and efficient EU energy system. The Vice-Mayor of the Latvian city of Liepāja is the rapporteur of the [opinion on the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration](#), adopted during the 5-7 May CoR Plenary session, which calls on to the European Commission and Members States to put into place a systematic approach to involve local and regional authorities in the energy transition, in particular within the development of national energy and climate plans. Energy production and consumption account for 75% of the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. An integrated energy system is therefore crucial to delivering on the European Green Deal's objective of reaching climate neutrality by 2050.

Can the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration play a role in the economic recovery of LRAs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Is a transition towards a more integrated energy system relevant for LRAs?

The EU Strategy for Energy System Integration has a role in the economic recovery of local and regional authorities in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. In making the transition towards a more integrated energy system, it is important to set the energy-efficiency-first objective at local and regional level, taking into account the broader context of the less developed regions and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This is because energy efficiency reduces total investment and costs needed in relation to energy production, infrastructure and consumption. Likewise, it reduces the use of land and materials, as well as pollution and biodiversity loss. Energy system integration can help local and regional authorities achieve greater energy efficiency as the available resources would be used for the transition to more efficient energy technologies.

However, when developing any energy system, it should be assessed whether it would lead to lower costs for businesses and people. The energy-efficiency-first principle should aim to reduce the climate impact and increase the resource efficiency of integrated energy supply systems as well as improving efficiency for end-users. At the same time care must be taken to ensure that the transition does not go against the interests of consumers, namely that efforts to improve energy efficiency do not lead to higher energy tariffs or other costs for people and businesses without appropriate compensation.

Municipalities can be as lighthouses to show green light for even greener European Union.

What will be the role of each region's existing basic infrastructure while shifting towards high-investment energy systems?

Without taking away from innovative solutions, when integrating the energy system, it is mainly necessary to strengthen each region's existing basic infrastructure, whose strengths and advantages have been proven in practice. Given that the situations in regions vary widely in terms of climate and infrastructure, creative and smart solutions should be sought for the weak points in each region's basic infrastructure. It would be wrong to say, therefore, that the use of electricity for heating buildings should be increased in all regions, for which heat pumps are specifically recommended. District heating is highly developed in a number of countries. In Latvia, for example, it covers more than 70% of the population, and the amount of energy supplied to customers by district heating is similar to the amount of electricity consumed in Latvia. District heating can contribute by providing energy storage and power generation and by making use of energy resources that cannot be exploited at building level.

What is the real potential of offshore renewable energy?

We should use the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future and support new offshore renewable technologies (e.g. tidal, wave and floating offshore wind and solar technologies) in a targeted manner, while at the same time supporting the EU's economic and environmental objectives. At the same time, there is a need for a clear plan to link offshore grid and offshore wind power generation directly to a cross-border interconnector in the future. Offshore energy production combined with cross-border transmission would allow significant savings in terms of costs and use of maritime space.

At the same time, green energy and biodiversity objectives should not be pitted against each other, but practical ways should be found to achieve them, thereby making it easier to realise the offshore energy potential more quickly in practice and ensuring concrete maritime spatial planning, not only in line with the biodiversity requirements, with less disruption for marine life, but also taking into account people's desire to preserve the marine landscape, the growing potential of eco-tourism and demands to preserve the attractiveness of natural surroundings.

How can methane leaks be better assessed globally?

According to the EU strategy to reduce methane emissions, the EU accounts for only 5% of global methane emissions. It can therefore be concluded that even the most ambitious EU plans to reduce methane emissions will have little impact on reducing the planet's greenhouse gas emissions. Imports of goods into the EU's single market should only be allowed from countries (or parts thereof) that provide the same standards for greenhouse gas reduction as the EU. Only in this way it will be possible to ensure that the climate targets set by the EU will not adversely affect the competitiveness of the EU and its businesses at global level.

We should urge faster detection of methane leaks both through the Copernicus programme and through other tools where the Copernicus programme is not able to provide sufficient data. It is essential to identify areas with significant methane leaks outside the EU and to make this information public,

thus enabling EU citizens to make informed choices as to whether to purchase goods produced in such locations.

Background:

The opinion '[Powering a climate-neutral economy: An EU Strategy for Energy System Integration](#)', adopted during the 144 Plenary (5-7 May 2021) of the European Committee of the Regions is a dossier of the CoR's [Green Deal Going Local](#) (GDGL) working group. Launched in [June 2020](#) and [composed of 13 local and regional elected representatives](#), the GDGL working group has the objective to guarantee that EU cities and regions are directly involved in the definition, implementation and assessment of the numerous initiatives that fall under the European Green Deal, the EU's sustainable growth strategy to reach climate-neutrality by 2050.

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