

La transition énergétique est une opportunité exceptionnelle de placer la société civile au cœur du processus décisionnel de l'UE

The energy transition offers huge potential for cities and regions to pursue new, innovative, and effective policies at regional level. At the July plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Energy Union, stressed how important it was to link the EU's energy initiatives to regional policy and development and to strengthen cooperation between EU bodies and civil society.

In the EESC plenary debate on decentralised energy provision, regional economic development and sustainable transport, Mr Šefčovič emphasised the important role that EU regions and cities can play in the Energy Union initiative as a rich source of innovative solutions. "It is at the local level that plans and political commitments are turned into concrete projects. The Energy Union cannot be built here in Brussels, but in our cities and in our villages. It has to be a collective effort, where we come up with creative solutions."

A number of actions will be developed locally, from rolling out charging points for urban electric vehicles to constructing smart buildings, not to mention decentralised renewable energy production and energy cooperatives. All this, in turn, will help boost local growth and jobs.

EESC President Luca Jahier pointed out that civil society had an important role to play. "The involvement of the EESC in the EU energy and transport policies is an opportunity to ensure that citizens are put at the heart of the Energy Union initiative", he echoed.

"The first priority of the Energy Union", added Mr Šefčovič, "is security of supply. Once we make sure that in Europe we have enough energy, then we need to meet our climate obligations. Once our energy is greener, we need our companies to use it and our industry to remain competitive in Europe, promoting innovative ideas". The central idea of the Energy Union is not to look at energy in isolation from the rest of the economy. This is why, for the first time, the Commission has adopted a unifying approach to energy and climate, which includes all related policy fields and where one of those fields – transport – has become more and more central, especially in recent years. Sustainability is key: transport is responsible for almost a quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions and, in comparison with other sectors, this share is growing.

Referring to the ongoing closures of coal mines across the EU, the issue of social justice for the energy poor and the need to modernise transport, Mr

Šefčovič highlighted the various actions that the Commission had so far carried out:

- providing support and technical assistance to former coal mining areas, through the creation of the **Platform for Coal Regions in Transition** (the EESC supported the initiative, organising several roundtables for discussion);
- setting up the **EU Energy Poverty Observatory**, which monitors and tackles the root causes of the energy poverty affecting approximately 50 million EU citizens (the EESC put forward the idea of creating such a body in 2013 and will shortly become a member of the consortium underpinning its work);
- structuring the recently adopted **3rd Mobility Package** around the three pillars of sustainability, safety and smart mobility (the EESC followed the developments closely and actively contributed to shaping the new policies, both at its own initiative and following referrals from other institutions). The **vice-president** stressed the strategic importance of the mobility package proposals and the need to act fast. Europe must implement innovations, and invest in new and clean technologies in order to offer better transport solutions, reduce air pollution and ensure a safer and healthier environment for its citizens, not to mention the economic dimension. Europe must become the leader in **battery technology** as an important basis for the energy and transport transition.

The commitment to the regional level and the cross-cutting approach to energy from the economic, social and environmental perspective is, however, not enough. Legislative measures need to be matched by cooperation among stakeholders across all sectors and borders, because, **Mr Šefčovič** concluded, “our goal is to make sure that no region – no citizen – is left behind”.

Mr Jahier outlined the work of the EESC on the matter, in particular the two opinions adopted at this plenary session, highlighting the often positive regional economic effects of the energy transition and the need to link energy and cohesion policies more systematically (opinion [TEN/660](#) on the effects of the energy transition on regional economies, rapporteur **Lutz Ribbe**).

On the role of transport, the **EESC president** underlined the need for a new and more integrated approach that considered the economic, social and environmental aspects and was geared towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs (opinion [TEN/661](#) on the role of transport in realising the UN sustainable development goals, rapporteur **Tellervo Kylä-Harukka-Ruonala**).

Some EESC members voiced their concerns on social and political aspects of the Energy Union. **Mr Šefčovič** reaffirmed the Commission’s commitment to future action aimed at removing the current barriers preventing people from active and full participation as “prosumers” in the energy transition and at building trust in green energy investors.

Mr Jahier concluded by emphasising the vision of the EESC and its role in ensuring that everybody’s voice was heard: “The EESC tries to make sure that

by bringing together the expertise of organised civil society from across Europe no one is left behind in the modernisation of Europe's economy, neither in terms of environment, jobs, opportunities to create economic value nor as a consumer".

Background – EESC opinions:

- [TEN/657](#) – Third report on the State of the Energy Union
- [TEN/643](#) – Clean, competitive and connected mobility for all