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Building on local climate and energy experience in Energy Union Governance

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The ongoing negotiations on Energy Union Governance will soon touch upon the establishment of permanent “*Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogue Platforms*”. These structures would provide a home for the active engagement of local authorities in managing the energy transition in Member States. This briefing shows that these platforms would build on existing successful practices while guaranteeing the same level of engagement across Europe.

European and national leaders would greatly benefit from building on the steady ambition of local actors to deliver Energy Union objectives. **CEMR, Climate Alliance, Energy Cities, EURO CITIES and ICLEI, representing thousands of local governments throughout the EU, as well as think tank E3G, wholeheartedly support the European Parliament proposals on this topic.**

Context: Negotiations on Energy Union Governance

European cities and regions have proven to be important and persistent delivery agents of the European transition towards a more decentralized, energy-efficient, and decarbonised energy system. Research shows that they will contribute to the overachievement of the EU’s climate objectives, with more than a third of the EU’s 2020 climate target delivered by cities.¹ And this is just the beginning: a fast-increasing number of local actors are coming to the realisation that improving their resilience, reducing their emissions, and moving to a sustainable energy system is in line with their own interests, and that of their citizens and businesses.

Despite this increasing involvement and growing political weight of local actors in European climate and energy discussions, notably through the Covenant of Mayors, **these front-runners do not have a permanent political structure which recognises and facilitates their contribution in each member state.** The Clean Energy for All Package, in particular the Energy Union Governance regulation, could provide a workable solution. The European Parliament report suggests deepening the participation of local actors in energy and climate planning while reinforcing the dialogue between national governments and local authorities.

Concretely, the Parliament supports the creation of “Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogue Platforms” (Art 10a – AM 113), which would help Member States to build their National Plans on the ambition and proven experiences of local authorities. The

¹ JRC, 2016, as reported in *Cities at the forefront of climate action*, October 2017



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platforms – whose format could be designed as per national specificities – would establish a permanent national dialogue bringing together local authorities, civil society organizations, the business community, investors and other relevant stakeholders. All of them would be consulted when national governments are drafting their Integrated National Energy and Climate Plans (NECP) as well as their Long-Term Climate and Energy Strategies.

These structures need to be permanent to ensure a continued engagement by stakeholders in the process rather than a rubber-stamping exercise. That means stakeholders are not only involved in the drafting of NECP, but also in the monitoring and reviewing process. A permanent dialogue on climate and energy would deliver several co-benefits:



Continuous political support

The energy transition requires a democratic mandate. This mandate should evolve over time to address new challenges.



Feedback loops

Delivery agents sometimes face unexpected consequences – there should be a feedback loop from them to the policy-makers to help delivering the energy transition and ensure the delivery of the targets.



Shared responsibility

The Transition is broader and more complex than adopting policies. It is first and foremost a collective journey in which everyone should play a part: public authorities, citizens as well as the private sector.



Better implementation

A continuous dialogue with stakeholders will ensure the adequate and swift implementation of policies.



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Spreading national best practices

This idea of ‘multilevel dialogue platforms’ may sound new, but there are several existing examples that proves the opposite. This briefing describes three different examples of national governments engaging with local authorities in national decision-making.

1. The Netherlands

The Netherlands is a prime example of formal partnerships between municipalities, provinces, and the national government on the energy transition. **National strategies on energy and climate are negotiated, agreed and signed off by municipalities** (represented by their national association VNG), **provinces** (represented by their national association IPO), **and various stakeholders** (employers’ associations and unions, nature conservation and environmental organisations, and other civil-society organisations and financial institutions).

In 2013, all signed off the national energy agreement containing energy savings and renewable energy goals until 2023. Most recently, in February 2018, VNG (municipalities) and IPO (provinces) signed a new interinstitutional agreement which will result in a new broad ‘National Agreement’. **Discussions are currently organised through five ‘tables’ focusing on transition pathways** for 1/ the built environment, 2/ industry, 3/ mobility, 4/ sustainable energy and 5/ food & nature, **around which the relevant national ministries, municipalities, provinces and stakeholders are represented.**

These negotiations are expected to close before summer, leading to an agreement which will make the country a frontrunner on climate and energy policy, set a new national greenhouse gas emission reduction objective of 49% (below 1990 levels) by 2030, and prepare the country for its delivery. An important part of these preparations will be the development of regional strategic climate and energy plans. Because these plans will focus on regions rather than on a country as a whole, they will take into account regional specificities and possibilities. These regional plans will contain commitments – both political and financial – from all regional partners involved and ensure that the energy transition is embedded in spatial planning and citizens are involved.

2. France

Over ten years ago, France set up its **Public Debate Commission², an independent body which missions are to inform citizens, and ensure their views are taken into account in decision-making processes.** This commission is currently playing a crucial role in the

² *Commission nationale du débat public (CNDP)*



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engaging citizens in the formulation of national energy plans through a “multiannual energy programming”³ exercise.

Specifically, the commission is organising the public debate around the energy plans to 2028 from March 19 until June 30, both at national and at local level. Many activities are foreseen in order to have a rich and constructive discussion:

- > **At national level**, an *online platform* will allow everyone to stay informed, ask questions and contribute to the debate. Also, *information sessions and debates* with experts presenting different views will be organised.

The Public Debate Commission will make sure to follow up on the discussions and to provide more detailed information on the platform, in different formats. Before the launch of the debate, 400 citizens will be randomly selected to be regularly informed on all the exchanges. This citizens panel will then meet in Paris in June 2018 in order to express its view on the most salient issues coming out of from the discussions held during the previous months.

- > **At local level**, *public debates* will be organised with regions and civil society. This will allow them to participate and bring forward their own specificities and requirements to the central Government.

Meetings with groups of citizens will be organised with the support of civil society organisations, targeting especially the ones who normally do not take part in such consultations. The Public Debate Commission has put together a debate kit that will be available to any politician, association or citizens’ groups willing to organise an event in the framework of this initiative.

3. Sweden

Sweden offers another strong, yet different, example of engagement of local authorities by the national government. Sweden’s specificity comes down to local and regional government targets and strategies inspired by national environmental and climate objectives as a political challenge and guided by expertise and support provided by national agencies.

The regional organisations of national government (County Administrative Boards) have been commissioned to help coordinate activities around the environment, energy, transport, etc. in order to formulate regional objectives and find strategies and solutions. They committed themselves to involve relevant stakeholders, and to support local and regional governments through expertise, administration and networking. National agencies have also been providing economic support, in different forms during the last couple of decades, to local investments.

³ *Programmations pluriannuelles de l’énergie (PPE)*



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As a result of their own political will and competence and this national support, the large majority of local and regional governments have formulated their own environment and climate objectives and strategies and undertaken several measures for energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable transport etc.

Sweden is currently preparing its first integrated NECP. Representatives of local and regional governments, as well as stakeholders, were invited to give their opinions in February 2018, shaping the preliminary submission to the European Commission expected for April 2018. An even broader consultation is planned for the final version of the NECP, planned for November 2018.

Conclusions

These examples demonstrate that the European Parliament's idea of establishing permanent "dialogue platforms" is not only feasible but – where already existing – it also provides excellent outcomes.

It shows that different approaches already exist, from France's focus on broad consultation; to the Netherlands' formal agreements between different levels of governance; or Sweden's capacity building efforts and can be adapted to different countries' cultures and levels of decentralisation.

To deliver a fair, affordable and efficient energy transition, national governments will need the contributions of every level of governance. Local authorities have demonstrated their willingness and capacity to take part in this process. The Energy Union Governance is the opportunity to recognise and institutionalise their efforts and contributions.

Further reading

E3G (2018), **Governance of the EU 2030 targets: The jury is still out**

ClientEarth (2018), **Public participation as part of the EU Climate Governance Regulation could help transition to a cleaner, more efficient energy future**

ClientEarth & EnergyCities (2017), **Joint Briefing: The Case for a Multi-level Climate and Energy Dialogue Platforms**