

Press Release

Brussels, 10 October 2014

European Commission seeks local authorities' help in addressing energy security

The Ukrainian gas crisis has placed renewed emphasis on the need to ensure stable and secure energy supplies for Europe's citizens and its economy. Last May, the EU Commission issued the European Energy Security Strategy, identifying local authorities as crucial partners in shielding Europe from energy shocks, more particularly in the framework of the Covenant of Mayors. The [High Level Conference](#) that took place on 9 October in Brussels provided some insight into how this is taking shape concretely.

The Commission yesterday reiterated its support to cities committed to the Covenant of Mayors movement, which now includes over 6, 000 signatories, some 70% of which having adopted a Sustainable Energy Action Plan. High level representatives from EU institutions, including Vice President of the European Commission Günther Oettinger, President of the Committee of the Regions Michel Lebrun and Chair of the European Parliament ITRE Committee Jerzy Buzek all joined to praise the Covenant of Mayors success, which has helped translate the 2020 EU climate and energy targets into local action across Europe.

'Energy vulnerable' Member States

Invited speakers included city representatives from the 6 most 'energy vulnerable' Member States, which depend on Russia as the single external supplier for their entire gas imports. As part of their commitment to the Covenant of Mayors, these cities have adopted action plans that identify a series of measures aimed at improving self-sufficiency by changing the way they use and source energy. According to preliminary analysis from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, implementation of the energy savings measures from the Covenant of Mayors action plans in these countries could save up to 58% of natural gas consumption!

By way of example, elected representatives from Helsinki and Riga told conference attendees how fuel-switching in district heating (DH) networks have contributed to reducing natural gas dependence within their territories. Impressive results were shared by the city of Tartu (Estonia), where the DH network is powered 92% by locally-sourced energy, such as wood chips and waste heat.

Financing the transition

The second session of the conference focused on the financing of the actions foreseen in the cities' plans, with particular emphasis on innovative funding mechanisms, including crowdfunding, revolving funds and the combination of grants and loans. Among the numerous examples presented, an inspiring success story was shared by Dirk Vansintjan from Ecopower about an energy cooperative which started modestly with discussions "around the kitchen table" and now includes some 50, 000 members and supplies 1.5% of the Flemish households with green electricity.



In his concluding remarks, Director General for Energy Dominique Ristori provided perspectives of the way ahead, pointing to the Covenant as forming an integral part of a new area, where smart technologies will give consumers incentives to use their rights and engage actively in the energy transition. Local and regional authorities are, therefore, key stakeholders, alongside the EU Member States, for Europe's energy security in the short-, medium- and long-term.

[Download Conference's Press Pack](#)

The Covenant of Mayors is the mainstream European movement involving local and regional authorities, voluntarily committing to increasing energy efficiency and decentralised energy production on their territories. By their commitment, Covenant Signatories aim to meet and exceed the European Union 20% CO2 reduction objective by 2020. More information: <http://www.eumayors.eu/>

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