

For a Europe of Projects: the example of the energy and climate policy

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Reviving people’s enthusiasm for Europe... Rekindling a desire for Europe... These expressions and variant versions are to be found in an increasing number of articles as the European elections are drawing near. Their authors are right. Nothing good is made without passion. The question is how to achieve it.

Enthusiasm, desire, passion... Let’s give way to dreams, starting with the following one.

In 2008, under French presidency, the European Union decided on a climate change and energy transition policy called the *Energy and Climate Package* in the EU non-fuss jargon. The package defined targets for greenhouse gas emissions, energy efficiency and renewable energy by 2020 and was supported by legal and financial instruments.

Let’s move on to the next dream. Having defined the so-called “3x20” – a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, a 20% improvement in energy efficiency and a 20% share for renewable energy - the European Commission could have addressed all decision-making levels in society (and especially the local and regional levels where energy is being used and renewable energy sources are to be found) reaching out to all players (citizens, company managers, farmers, craftsmen, town planners, forest managers, heating technicians, bankers, etc.) and telling them: *“Those vital objectives for the planet, Europe, our respective countries, your territories’ economies, local jobs and the citizens’ quality of life will only be attained if everybody does their bit; no level, no player can meet them alone. So let’s join forces on a voluntary and win-win basis! Let’s work together and meet this common challenge.”*

This sounds like a dream, so far away from the European Commission’s usual practice. But surprising as it may seem, this dream came true. Eight weeks after adopting the famous *Energy and Climate Package*, 350 mayors from all across Europe and beyond met at the European Parliament in Brussels, not to contest the decision, but to sign the *Covenant of Mayors*². What is this all about? It is about committing to achieving and exceeding the EU targets in their territories, preparing and submitting a Sustainable Energy Action Plan and reporting on actions and results on a regular basis. To date, over 5,500 towns and cities from 51 countries have signed the Covenant, most of them with their Regions or Provinces, with the support of professional, industrial or local authority associations and NGOs. Over 3,500 have already submitted their action plans and the first reports are starting to come in. Local players are usually associated with this process. Signatories range from capital cities to medium-size towns and villages, and represent a total of 183 million inhabitants. One of the outcomes of this initiative is that at least 20% of the European Structural Funds are now available to regions for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, a Covenant of Mayors’ instrument that is currently being used to display solidarity with Ukrainian cities. The initiative is also a springboard for co-operation between twin cities and has been instrumental in the co-operation process with Chinese cities.

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² www.eumayors.eu

This is therefore not a fairy tale but a genuine reality only specialised media know about. Several points remain to be improved but the momentum is there.

How did this *bottom up* approach, as they say, come to exist? Thanks to the co-ordinated action of institutions on the one hand, in the person of the European Commissioner for Energy of the time, Mr Piebalgs, who launched the initiative, and European city networks on the other hand, including the network I have the privilege to lead. The European Parliament has always supported the initiative and all the institutions, including the European Investment Bank, have followed suit.

According to Dennis Meadows, who wrote the “energy” chapter of *The Limits to Growth* report published by the MIT in 1972, energy is a *universal* issue in that it concerns everyone, from citizens and businesses to local and regional authorities, States, the European Union and beyond. The Ukrainian crisis demonstrates once again that energy is also connected to democracy, independence and peace. A wonderful subject for a shared European project!

The governance we want for Europe is *multilevel and multiplayer* governance that is not limited to Member States but reaches out to the citizens. So let’s embark with renewed strength on the journey towards 2030, the new horizon for the EU energy and climate policy, and towards 2050, the horizon set for the UN Conference on Climate Change that is to take place in France in 2015.

Let’s take these issues in hand, at all levels and especially at the territorial level, where the new energy paradigm is being invented! Let’s stop crying over what does not work and let’s concentrate on what does in this field and in others. The future belongs to us.

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