

## The Covenant of Mayors: an atypical initiative without precedent in Europe!

The European Union adopted its Energy & Climate Package mid-December 2008. Eight weeks later, in February 2009, 350 mayors from European cities officially joined the Covenant of Mayors ([www.eumayors.eu](http://www.eumayors.eu)) during an event organised at the European Parliament in Brussels in the presence of over 1,000 attendees. Their numbers rose to over 750 at the beginning of October 2009 and will soon reach the 1,000 mark. A huge success indeed!

Such voluntary commitment of local decision-makers to supporting -and sharing- a European policy is probably a first in the history of the European Union. Movements on this scale are usually set up to protest against EU policies, not to approve them. With the Covenant of Mayors, it is quite the opposite!

**What is it all about?** Mayors are committing themselves, on a unilateral basis, to exceeding the EU objectives set for 2020 by reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in their *territories* by 20%. But it does not just involve municipal *properties*: citizens, companies, the housing sector, transport and all economic and human activities are concerned. A challenge for sure!

**What are the Mayors – and their city councils – committing themselves to?** They are committed to measuring the energy used in their territories, its uses and origins, etc., as well as the corresponding CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, so as to establish a baseline that can be used for defining objectives and evaluating results. In climate as in budgetary issues, there is no management without accounting. Then, or simultaneously, the signatories prepare a Sustainable Energy Action Plan for the medium-term in liaison with local players and citizens. These plans must be finalised within one year of signing the Covenant. Two years later, a first progress report is to be presented on the measures carried out so far. This is not, therefore, just empty words, it is all about strategy and practical action.

**Where does this idea come from?** The European Commission (DG TREN) took this initiative, which was expected and even demanded by the most advanced cities and European local authority networks, like Energie-Cités ([www.energie-cites.eu](http://www.energie-cites.eu)). Initially composed of a small number of large cities (25 to 30), the Covenant of Mayors now appeals to all cities committed to moving forward, regardless of their size. It is indeed up to the European society as a whole to come to grips with the European objectives and face up to the energy and climate constraints, now and in the future, by making the necessary trajectory adjustments. The time of pilot-actions, necessarily limited in number, must now be followed by massive changes.

**Why is the involvement of local authorities so essential?** 80% of the European population live in urban areas. If cities do not take ambitious measures now, we have virtually no chance of one day achieving the European objectives. This is a generally admitted fact and cities, therefore, have a crucial role to play.

Local authorities conceive the *urban system* which determines all the rest: urban planning sustainability, building energy performance, accessibility of community services limiting needless motorised transport, the choice of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, the sharing of public space amongst all users, parking policies, etc. All these aspects overdetermine the amount of energy used by the inhabitants in a given territory. But an *urban system* is not only a collection of stationary (buildings) and moving (vehicles) objects in a territory, it is also a complex set of relations linking said objects, like whether or not it is feasible to safely cycle to work or to the shops from home. Laws cannot regulate this; it must be worked into the complexity of urban development.

The role of a local authority is also to conduct the musicians performing in its territory. These musicians are numerous and their instruments various: town planners, architects, plumbers, transport officers, housing managers, energy specialists and simple citizens. They are not always ready to play the same piece. This is why local authorities must set the tone, be exemplary, point out the path to take, catalyse, engage local stakeholders and rely on the most dynamic ones to build policies and implement change-inducing measures.

This represents considerable change in comparison to previous -and often still operating- urban development practices! But it is the only way forward if prevailing discourses are to be believed.

**So what?** Beyond strictly local aspects, this commitment of cities also provides Member States and the European Union with a unique opportunity to learn from a multitude of experiences and achieve the objectives they have set themselves in terms of legislation, taxation, financing, etc., whilst encouraging the transition towards “low energy” cities. We all know that old frameworks -designed at a time when energy was abundant- are still too often obstacles to change. This initiative also involves mobilising society to support European negotiators in the post-Kyoto period, whilst providing a good example of the multi-level governance an increasing number of players is asking for. This and much more, is what the Covenant of Mayors is all about!

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