

Speech of Commissioner Kadri Simson
EESC Conference on Tackling Energy Poverty

21st April 2022

President Schweng, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Thank you for giving me the chance to speak to you today.

Energy poverty is a sad reality that we know millions of EU citizens face.

And that reality is being made even worse by current events.

The tragedy of the war in Ukraine only adds to the uncertainty, and prolonged period of volatile energy prices.

Both have a ripple effect on EU citizens.

It is more evident than ever that we should protect those in need, but also empower all people across the Member States through our energy policy. This is also the recipe for a fair transition, witnessed by this Conference's programme.

In March, we released our Communication on REPowerEU – our plan to ultimately remove Russian fossil fuel imports from our system, and take full control of our energy future.

It's focused on diversifying our gas supplies while speeding up the deployment of renewables. We believe that we can already reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two thirds before the end of this year.

And producing renewables is not the only avenue. It goes in parallel with energy savings, and this means that everybody can contribute! We are working on a Union-wide Energy Savings Plan, as the cheapest energy is still the one that is not used.

These are the next steps in protecting consumers from high prices, but certainly not the first ones.

Since last October our Energy Prices Toolbox has helped Member States to shield people and businesses from the impact of higher prices. Especially those in the most vulnerable situations, who we need to go the extra distance for.

Countries across the EU have made excellent use of it so far. We have seen measures to:

- Reduce energy taxation
- Extend the concept of vulnerable groups or energy poor households
- Measures to support businesses
- Top ups of direct income support
- And in exceptional cases, price regulation

Beyond the Toolbox, I want to mention our other initiatives working for our citizens.

We recently established the Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group. They will discuss the implementation of emergency measures and they will continue to examine their evolution as time goes on.

Last year's Fit for 55 package has a continuous thread of a socially fair transition throughout. For instance, think of the Social Climate Fund, a true novelty in how the EU handles transition. The updated Energy Efficiency and Energy Performance of Buildings directives also strengthen the legal framework so that we can be tougher on energy poverty.

Everyone should have the right to live in a building that is energy efficient and renovated as appropriate. It's also a way of dealing with the issue at its core – from the beginning citizens avoid high energy costs instead of receiving help after the fact.

And I know that the European Economic and Social Committee gave very supportive opinions on these proposals. Something I want to thank you for.

As I said earlier, it's not only about protecting, it's also a matter of empowering. And we want to empower our citizens through greater consumer rights.

We are proposing to include most consumer rights aspects of the Electricity Directive into the law for the future gas market.

- support for people in a vulnerable position
- greater ease for switching providers
- and a possibility of price regulation when options are running out

This is our responsibility to take through a consumer-oriented EU legislative framework.

By the end of May, we will bring forward the necessary follow-up measures to the REPowerEU plan, also to ensure the optimal functioning of the electricity market. We want to reap any benefits from low cost energy. Clean energy is the cheapest, and crucial for blocking out energy poverty in the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

These are the key tools that we are using to fight energy poverty and defend our citizens in this new era of insecurity.

I know that they will be picked up in each of the panels you have today. I hope they provide a good basis for kicking off your discussion.

Thank you for listening, and I wish you an excellent conference today.