



The development of the governance system proposed in the context of the 2030 climate and energy framework

Position paper – April 2015¹

"There is citizen confusion and distrust over energy policy. There are also hugely varying attitudes among Member States. What we need is a European Energy Dialogue that addresses the social and political angle of this issue, and that acts in parallel with the governance framework to draw citizens and consumers into the process of energy transition. This will be instrumental in the delivery of results."

Richard Adams, rapporteur on EESC opinion: 'The development of the governance system proposed in the context of the 2030 climate and energy framework'

Introduction

The EESC and the European Commission agree that successful implementation of the EU Energy Union – together with achieving concrete results at the crucial Climate Agreement talks in Paris at the end of 2015 – will depend very much on putting in place a reliable and transparent governance system. This will help to ensure that the EU meets its targets. Without the involvement of all stakeholders, however, governance simply cannot work. All too often, important policies are not well understood by consumers and can be misinterpreted by civil society, leading to weak public support for EU policies and a general lack of trust.

Recognising that EU and national energy policies have a direct and hugely significant impact on the lives of citizens, the EESC has been instrumental in pioneering the concept of the European Energy Dialogue (EED) in order to promote public engagement. An EESC opinion by rapporteur Richard Adams entitled 'Exploring the needs and methods of public involvement and engagement in the energy policy field' was adopted in March 2013.

In adopting this opinion, the EESC agreed, in principle, to prepare the path by which a European-wide dialogue on energy issues moves from theory to reality. Over the past two years the EESC has been developing a consistent strategy designed to deliver on this objective.

What the EU is doing

While the EU had been making good progress towards meeting its climate and energy targets for 2020², an integrated policy framework

for the period up to 2030 was needed to ensure regulatory certainty for investors and a coordinated approach among Member States. Following the Commission's Communication on the 2030 framework for climate and energy³ adopted in January 2014, the European Council agreed on the need to develop a reliable and transparent governance system to help ensure that the EU meets its energy policy goals. The 2030 framework proposed a new governance framework based on national plans for secure, sustainable and competitive energy as well as a set of key indicators to assess progress over time.

In February 2015, the Commission published its Communication on the Energy Union⁴, a key EU political priority designed to significantly reduce Europe's reliance on fossil fuels by removing barriers to the flow of energy in a fully integrated EU-wide energy system. Both the climate and energy frameworks are target-driven, and will require a reorientation by Member States of their energy mix and energy efficiency strategies. This must be accomplished in a manner that retains national sovereignty while also being complementary with neighbours and converging on agreed EU-level objectives. The European institutions agree that effective governance mechanisms relating to energy transition are therefore essential.

The EESC's position

In September 2014, the European Commission decided to consult the EESC on the development of the governance system proposed in the context of the 2030 climate and energy framework. The end result is this opinion, adopted in plenary in April 2015⁵. In it, the EESC "strongly supports" the Commission's proposed governance structure, consisting of a general guideline framework followed by regional discussions, assessments and continuing adjustment. The Opinion notes, however, that policy coherence can only be achieved when citizens truly feel that their values and views are recognised and taken into account.

The EESC also welcomes the Commission's position that this governance process must involve "... an energy dialogue with stakeholders to inform policy-making and support active engagement in managing the energy transition."⁶ The EESC notes, however, that there is still no clear guidance on how the supporting structures of this dialogue should be built, and urges that this be remedied by the Council and Parliament.

1. Disclaimer: This position paper is based on the EESC draft opinion approved by the relevant section and does not take account of any further amendments introduced at the plenary session.

2. http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/package/index_en.htm

3. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0015&from=EN6>

4. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:1bd46c90-bdd4-11e4-bbe1-01aa75ed71a1.0001.03/DOC_1&format=PDF

5. <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.34551>

6. http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:1bd46c90-bdd4-11e4-bbe1-01aa75ed71a1.0001.03/DOC_1&format=PDF

What is missing, fundamentally, is public engagement. A fully functioning EED would allow for national energy preferences to be better conveyed and taken into account at EU level. Involving consumers and stakeholders in managing the energy transition towards more demand-oriented strategies, says rapporteur Richard Adams, would greatly increase the chances of an effective transition.

There are also growing tensions within each Member State, ranging from concern over price rises to over-dependence on imports. These need to be examined in an open and transparent manner in order to rebuild consumer trust and confidence. In other words, it is the political and social aspect of energy transition that the EED must tackle. An informed public will provide more political certainty, lead to more consumer engagement and help to form the basis for a more positive relationship with energy suppliers.

EESC recommendations

The EESC wants to see clear political will towards establishing the EED, articulated and developed alongside the Energy Union. The EESC wants to see the European Council and Parliament – in their consideration of the Energy Union Package – adopt, as action points, the measures set out in this Opinion on the implementation of the EED in order to better support the governance process.

The EED should be independent and enable all stakeholders to exchange information, express views and influence policy-making on energy issues. Though pan-European in nature, dialogues should be established in each Member State, recognising existing national energy dialogue initiatives but incorporating as targets the objectives of the climate and energy framework.

Substantial funding and resources for the EED will be required. A mechanism should therefore be put in place to establish an independent funding pool, drawn primarily from stakeholders throughout the energy production and supply chain, and supplemented by appropriate EU and Member State government support.

National debates and regional discussions with neighbouring national EED groups should be organised, with Member States' national plans providing an account of consultations with neighbouring Member States within the EED. EU-level discussions between all energy dialogue groups would then follow. These discussions, channelled through the independent coordinating structure, would have advisory status with EU institutions and ultimately enhance the cost-effectiveness of EU and Member State policies.

"The EESC is taking the lead in developing and implementing the EED, which underlines the importance of civil society involvement in policy development. This is one reason why the EED is a priority project of the EESC's current work programme and has been recognised and included as an essential element in the development and implementation of the Energy Union package. The EESC is the right body to push this through."

Ulla Sirkeinen, co-rapporteur on EESC opinion:

'The development of the governance system proposed in the context of the 2030 climate and energy framework'

Further information

March 2015 EESC opinion: The development of the governance system proposed in the context of the 2030 climate and energy framework: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.34551>

Energy Union Communication:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:1bd46c90-bdd4-11e4-bbe1-01aa75ed71a1.0001.03/DOC_1&format=PDF

Energy Union: webpage http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/energy-union/index_en.htm

January 2014 policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0015&from=EN>

March 2013 EESC Opinion 'Exploring the needs and methods of public involvement and engagement in the energy policy field':

<http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.ten-opinions.25693>