

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 335 (2011)¹

Energy supply and energy efficiency at local and regional level: promoting energy transition

1. The 21st century is set to see major changes in the energy field which will have a direct impact on local and regional authorities:

a. a physical limit on the availability of fossil and fissile fuels has become a serious possibility;

b. the consequences of energy consumption in terms of climate change are threatening the balance of the biosphere;

c. the strong growth taking place in the emerging countries is leading to a significant increase in energy consumption and greenhouse-gas emissions;

d. the high level of energy prices could make energy inaccessible to a growing part of the population, which would no longer be able to meet its minimum needs for comfort and mobility, thus accelerating social exclusion.

2. The present picture of energy supply and energy efficiency is therefore as follows:

a. a continuing upward trend of energy prices, especially those of oil, gas and electricity;

b. “peak oil”,² according to the International Energy Agency, was reached in 2006;

c. the nuclear accident at Fukushima in March 2011 has brought the nuclear safety issue to the fore and is prompting a number of countries to abandon the nuclear route;

d. interest is increasing in improving energy efficiency as a key solution to energy problems;

e. a wide range of renewable energy resources is now economically and technologically available;

f. despite the climate emergency context, international negotiations are making only slow progress.

3. The energy supply framework prevailing today represents a break in the link between energy and the local area, with local and regional authorities being excluded from the major decisions taken and consequently becoming heavily energy-dependent. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe is convinced that the present situation requires a transition to a new energy paradigm in which “flow” (renewable) energies are used and consumption is lower and more efficient.

4. It has become imperative to lower the costs to energy consumers, especially for individual consumers, in order to reduce the excessive dependence on only a limited number of energy suppliers or energy supply methods. It has also become imperative to give consumers a possibility of choosing among a wide variety of alternative energy sources, and to encourage citizens’ initiatives and innovation in energy production.

5. In this new paradigm, local and regional authorities will play a decisive role as energy consumers, urban planners, investors, energy producers and distributors and should set an example to the population and local stakeholders.

6. The new paradigm calls for the close co-operation of all levels of government, including transfer of resources from the national state to the regional and local sector to secure immediate and sufficient climate action.

7. The Congress is also convinced that this new paradigm is already appearing, especially following initiatives by local and regional authorities. Suitable technologies and systems are already available and there is no shortage of practical examples. Nevertheless, the energy transition process must be accelerated (or started where it has not yet taken off) in order to make our societies less vulnerable and guide them towards a more judicious use of natural resources, with due respect for the balance of the biosphere.

8. The Congress affirms that such a transition requires, on the one hand, decentralised energy policies and, on the other hand, initiatives by towns and regions to change the existing situation. In this context, local and regional authorities must have adequate competences and responsibilities relating to energy supply and use. All action to manage energy resources better must involve local and regional stakeholders.

9. In addition, the Congress points out that under the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No.122 – Article 4) local and regional authorities must be consulted on all energy-transport infrastructure decisions. The purpose of this is to enable them to exercise their choice of supply methods and sources and to control the impact of transport infrastructure on the areas concerned. Regions and countries which export energies must not be able to impose their choices on the areas concerned unilaterally.

10. The Congress notes the vital importance of a sustainable energy supply and reliable energy for the regions and local communities in Europe, which is determined by a stable, reliable and smooth supply of energy resources and diversification of their routes.

11. The Congress underlines the importance of considering the interests of the regions and localities through which trans-European energy infrastructures pass, and the use of modern technologies and control systems for the construction and operation of these facilities, in order to ensure the preservation of the environment and the rational use of natural resources. In addition, it is essential that local and regional authorities receive the appropriate budget allocations in connection with the implementation of the main energy infrastructure projects.

12. Referring to its previous work in this field, the Congress also reaffirms the relevance of its Resolution 262 (2008) on public local and regional action: for a new energy culture, and of its Resolution 248 (2008) on climate change: building the adaptive capacity of local and regional authorities, both of which remain highly topical.

13. The Congress welcomes the action which is being undertaken by regional and municipal networks, such as, in particular, the European Foundation for the Sustainable Development of the Regions (FEDRE) and Energy Cities, and considers that they play an important role in promoting energy policies and energy efficiency at local and regional level.

14. In the light of the above, the Congress invites the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe to:

a. take full stock of their responsibilities in dealing with the energy challenges with which we are already confronted. Mere awareness that something must be done is today no longer sufficient – action must be taken now as a matter of urgency;

b. debate the energy transition question in their deliberative assemblies so as to facilitate inclusion of this fundamental issue in all sectoral policies;

c. acquire the means to become fully aware of energy flows into their area, as well as the associated emissions of pollutants, including by sector (residential, tertiary, transport, etc.), and according to use (heating, specific electricity, etc.);

d. seek systematically to achieve energy savings in municipal buildings and throughout the residential and tertiary sectors and encourage the public display of those buildings' energy performance (labelled from A to G);

e. list the total of local resources that can be used for energy supply (biomass, biogas, geothermal heat, seas and lakes, solar power, wind, waste, heat recovery, etc.);

f. set up/define pluriannual sustainable energy action plans covering the following aspects: energy consumption, area planning, investment, energy production and distribution, setting an example for the population and local and regional stakeholders, including quantified objectives and the associated budgets;

g. irrespective of the European country concerned, join the Covenant of Mayors³ (as signatories for towns and as local co-ordinators for regions and provinces), which is nowadays the reference movement for local and regional authorities;

h. appoint, in their executive bodies, policy heads responsible for energy, climate and sustainable development issues, and create or strengthen the corresponding committees;

i. ensure the presence of suitably skilled human resources within their administrations (pluridisciplinary energy

management units) and in outside bodies (local energy and climate agencies);

j. involve citizens, economic stakeholders (small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), very small enterprises (VSEs), etc.) and social stakeholders (associations, trade unions) in defining and implementing local energy policies, in order to share a common vision of the local area as one offering low energy consumption and high quality of life for all;

k. encourage citizens' initiatives as well as investments in innovation as far as energy production and supply are concerned, and ensure that citizens have an option of individual energy production, for example by installing solar panels or windmills on their property;

l. participate in networking at national and European level in order to share experiences and influence decisions by governments and supranational institutions; take into account, in this regard, the experience of the existing networks, such as, for example, the Transition Town network⁴ in the United Kingdom, Italy, Ireland and other countries around the world; and develop relations, partnership and exchange of best practices between local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member states within their competence on the energy supply and energy efficiency issues;

m. contribute to the activities in the framework of the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All (2012), which will feature the Earth Summit 20 years after the historic Rio Conference laid the foundations for sustainable world governance.

15. Furthermore, the Congress:

a. invites local and regional networks such as, in particular, FEDRE and Energy Cities to pursue their action aimed at promoting energy policies and energy efficiency as well as best practices in this field at local and regional level in the spirit of the present resolution;

b. instructs its Current Affairs Committee to present, in 2015, a report assessing the situation with energy supply and energy efficiency at local and regional level;

c. instructs its Governance Committee to take account of energy policies and energy efficiency as an integral part of good local and regional governance.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2011, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG(21)11, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: S. Orlova, Russian Federation (R, EPP/CD).

2. Peak oil is the point in time when the maximum rate of global petroleum extraction is reached, after which the rate of production enters terminal decline.

3. The Covenant of Mayors is a European movement involving local and regional authorities committed to increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources on their territories.

4. Transition Network, www.transitionnetwork.org.