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Introduction to debates on:

**The Role of Regions in Energy Transition
and**

**Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: Regional Experience
and Lessons Learned**

Concept paper prepared by the Secretariat

The Role of Regions in Energy Transition

At its session in October 2023, the Chamber of Regions of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities will hold a debate on the role of regions in energy transition. The debate will provide an opportunity to highlight examples of best practice by regional policy makers working to ensure the transition to new forms of energy productions and supply in their regions, as well as to address challenges encountered in this process. The participants will also examine to what extent regional governments and assemblies enjoy the policy autonomy to effectively implement transformative and green energy policies for the benefit of their citizens.

Energy policy is at the forefront of attention by policymakers, including the EU Green Deal launched in December 2019, the commitment from leaders at this year's UN SDG Summit to urgently and immediately address the challenges of climate change.¹ The need for urgent action on climate change was also highlighted in the Council of Europe's Reykjavik declaration at the recent 4th summit of Heads of State and Government.²

In addition, the past two years have seen upheaval on the energy markets in Europe, mainly resulting from Russia's war against Ukraine. Many countries have been forced to re-consider longstanding energy supply arrangements and seek alternative sources of supply. In some places, this has led to the temporary resurgence of more polluting forms of energy such as coal. At the same time, national governments have been trying to "future-proof" investments in the energy sector, for example by planning for the hydrogen economy.

However, these recent developments do not change the underlying "energy trilemma" facing policymakers and societies. Successful energy policy must find a way to lower carbon emissions, safeguard a secure energy supply, and ensure affordable prices. The sustainability imperatives driving the energy transition have been high on the agenda of policy makers at different levels of government for some time now. Access to affordable and clean energy is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and is crucial to meeting commitments from the Paris climate agreement.

Local and regional authorities are strong contributors to the energy transition, and together account for about two-thirds of climate-related investment.³ As the closest level to the citizens, they are best placed to raise awareness of the importance and relevance of investing in energy efficiency and small to medium-scale renewable energy projects. Local and regional governments can therefore also play a key role in mobilising a whole of society approach to challenges posed by the energy transition.

The Congress has contributed to this process with a track-record of encouraging regional governments to play a transformative role in energy policy. The Congress' Resolution 335 (2011) pointed to a paradigm-shift in the energy sector, correctly predicting that local and regional authorities would play a decisive role in this energy transition. Back in 2011, the Congress argued that local and regional authorities should play a key role as energy consumers, urban planners, investors, energy producers and distributors and should set an example to the population and local stakeholders.⁴ The resolution called for close cooperation between all levels of government in decentralising energy policy so that regional authorities could have adequate competences and responsibilities relating to energy supply and use.

Successfully transitioning to a sustainable energy framework will continue to require significant investment and efforts from private citizens and locally based small and medium-sized enterprises. Thanks to their close connection to citizens, local and regional levels of government also have a key

¹ Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, A/HLPF/2023/L.1 available [here](#).

² Reykjavík Summit of the Council of Europe United around our values, available [here](#)

³ OECD (2019), 'Financing climate objectives in cities and regions to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth:', OECD Environment Policy Paper, No 17.

⁴ Resolution 335 (2011)1, Energy supply and energy efficiency at local and regional level: promoting energy transition

role to play in building consensus and public trust, which is essential to ensure the success of larger scale infrastructure projects which will be essential for the new energy paradigm.

Recent experience shows that profit-sharing mechanisms, whereby territorial communities benefit directly from energy infrastructure projects in their local area, can also be key to securing acceptance of energy investments by local populations.⁵ This seems particularly true for sometimes controversial renewable infrastructure projects such as large windfarms or high-voltage transmission lines.

The debate follows an exchange of views during the Chamber of Regions Bureau meeting in March 2023 with the Province of Girona (Spain) on its Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan that involved the establishment of an “energy community” and efforts to promote transition to green sources among the province’s 221 municipalities, through subsidies and other incentives. The Action Plan also included the establishment of eight “Energy Transition Offices” located throughout the province; over a period of four years, its implementation had attracted more than €16 million in investments. The province of Girona is one of the three pilot regions of the ePlanet H2020 project. ePlanet H2020 is a European project which facilitates and eases the deployment of coordinated energy transition actions by the public sector, and which will contribute to the debate with the participation of the Vice-Governor of Crete (Greece), a region member of the Alliance of Regions for Energy Transition.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: Regional Experience and Lessons Learned

The Chamber of Regions’ roundtable discussion on “**Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): regional experience and lessons learned**” is a follow-up to the Congress Recommendation 493 (2023) to the United Nations SDGs Summit, adopted in March during the 44th Session. In this recommendation, the Congress calls for accelerated localisation of SDGs and for greater involvement of local and regional authorities (LRAs) in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, calling on national governments to give LRAs proper autonomy of action and proper means for achieving SDG targets in their communities. This recommendation goes hand in hand with the opinion on “**Progress in the implementation of SDGs**”, adopted by the European Committee of the Regions in February 2023. It is also timely for the Chamber of Regions to have a discussion on this topic, as the Political Declaration of the UN SDGs Summit in September 2023 commits to further localising SDGs and acknowledges the role of LRAs in their implementation. The Congress had been advocating for a long time for such recognition to be given to local and regional authorities.

For over two decades now, the Congress has been developing its activities in different areas that directly relate to the achievement of the SDGs, such as the promotion of human rights, the fight against discrimination, gender equality, local and regional governance, as well as public ethics, citizen participation, migration management and social inclusion. Through its statutory and cooperation activities, the Congress’s work addresses 12 of the 17 SDGs. To successfully implement the SDGs, the Congress cooperates with a wide range of actors both internal and external to the Council of Europe. In 2019, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution 2272 (2019) calling for greater synergies between the two institutions in the implementation of the SDGs.

The Congress firmly believes that new strategies to implement the SDGs should be based on a bottom-up approach, as local and regional levels can adopt a more inclusive stance, especially as they can more easily involve the various stakeholders on the ground. Regions and cities are key to implementing SDGs. Indeed, two-thirds of SDGs cannot be achieved without their involvement. A multilevel governance approach is thus needed.

In October 2019, the Chamber of Regions already held a debate on “**Implementation of the SDGs: the role of regions**”. The Action Plan by the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands (Spain) on the implementation of Agenda 2030 was presented, at the time, by Carolina DARIAS SAN SEBASTIÁN, Councillor of the Government of the Canary Islands.

As the year 2023 marks the mid-point of the Agenda’s implementation, it is opportune to hold another discussion on this issue. Especially so, because, in the past few years, the COVID-19 pandemic, the

⁵ Akzeptanzfördernde Faktoren erneuerbarer Energien, BfN-Skripten 551 available [here](#).

war in Ukraine, the rising inflation and the energy crisis in Europe have led to a setback in the progress towards meeting the SDGs' targets. This roundtable discussion will thus be an opportunity for selected regions to share their experiences dealing with these crises and how it has impacted their work on SDG implementation.

The objective is to examine the approaches and practices of selected European regions in implementing SDGs, looking at both their successes and failures. Elected representatives from regions which have regularly and / or recently published Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) will take part in this debate, to present best practices and examples. VLRs ensure ownership of the Agenda 2030 by local authorities and can be a useful tool, because they reflect the realities on the ground, show what is working in the local communities and the progress towards target indicators. It is important to give a voice to regional authorities that are strongly involved in the implementation of SDGs, as national indicators and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are not enough to provide a detailed overview and roadmap for concrete local action.

The roundtable will include questions on the process to draft and publish VLRs; on the importance of including regional authorities in the process of SDG implementation; on the need to coordinate with national governments, namely for assistance and support from the central to the local level. Participants will also address, amongst other topics, the involvement of citizens – and more specifically of youth – in the process. All in all, the roundtable aims to look at where regional authorities stand on the various aspects raised by the Congress recommendation.