

Action on climate is urgent and citizens must remain at the heart of future energy policies, insist Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič and EESC President Luca Jahier



The fight against climate change and the promotion of sustainable energy were high on the agenda at the July plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). At the end of the mandate of the current European Commission, Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič, Vice-President responsible for the Energy Union and EESC President, Luca Jahier engaged in a fruitful discussion on the future of Europe and took a firm stand: citizens must continue to be involved and consulted in the decisions on the transition to a carbon-neutral society.

Fighting climate change

There is recognition across Europe that action on climate is urgently needed, said Mr Šefčovič at the EESC plenary on 20 July 2019, adding that climate had become one of the central electoral topics in the EU and that In Europe we are finally looking at climate change as an opportunity to refocus and reorganise our economy.

On the same page was Mr Jahier who maintained that the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 was key to the future of Europe and wondered whether, despite much progress made in the fight against climate change, there would still be sufficiently ambitious policies and resources to underpin the long-term ambition of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.

Through the Energy Union project, the Commission has developed a vision for a carbon-neutral Europe. According to Mr Šefčovič, *We have proven that we don't need to choose between economic growth and climate. It is possible to grow our economy (by 58%) and cut emissions at the same time (by 22%). This is backed by the 4 million "green jobs" in the EU, of which 1.4 million are in the renewable energy sector alone.*

The Energy Union, a reality

Mentioning the *Fourth Report of the State of the Energy Union*, adopted on 9 April 2019, Mr Šefčovič highlighted that the Energy Union had become reality. *We promised to provide Europe with energy that is secure, sustainable, competitive as well as affordable. Now we can say that we have achieved not only this, but so much more. We have kick-started a deep transformation and modernisation of our economies, he emphasised, referring to decentralised and*

decarbonised energy production and consumption, infrastructure deployment, and smart technologies.

Mr Jahier congratulated **Mr Šefčovič** for being so responsive to civil society organisations, underlining in particular the central vision of the Energy Union initiative in the past five years. *Citizens are put at the core, they take ownership of the energy transition, benefit from new technologies to reduce their bills, participate actively in the market, and vulnerable consumers are protected*, he commented.

Implementing the Energy Union with citizens at its core

With reference to the next step, **Mr Šefčovič** indicated that now that the Energy Union in Europe had been put on a very firm footing, we needed to make sure that it was properly implemented on the ground. He then specified that the Commission had already presented its recommendations to the Member States regarding their first ever National Energy and Climate Plans and that every Member State was now planning policies along the guidelines of the Energy Union.

By creating the legislative framework of the energy transition, the Commission has strongly delivered on what it promised, noted **Mr Jahier**, who also added that, looking ahead, it would now be important to see the Energy Union become a reality on the ground in the near future. On this subject, he also expressed a concern. He wondered whether future energy policies would still seek to put the citizens “at the core of the Energy Union” and in particular how it would be possible to help enterprises and workers to play a crucial role in this transition leading to a sustainable growth for all in the years to come.

The need for a permanent dialogue with citizens and a social pact

In this respect, to accompany the energy transition, **Mr Jahier** stressed the need to establish a permanent citizens’ dialogue including meaningful participation in decision-making processes and a social pact between governments, authorities, social partners and civil society (opinion [SC/051](#) on the Strategy for long-term EU greenhouse gas emissions reduction, adopted at the July plenary). *We will bring the EU closer to citizens, through involving them directly in policy-making processes and in putting into practice the transition to a climate-neutral Europe*, he concluded.

Referring to the EESC call for an agreement on a social pact, **Mr Šefčovič** also underlined that it was necessary to actively engage with citizens in climate policy-making, and pointed out: *The Energy Union cannot be built in Brussels, but back in the Member States. The transition must be done comprehensively – making sure that no region, sector or social group is left behind. It must be a socially fair transition owned by all actors.*

Background

For further information on the work carried out by the EESC on [climate change](#) and [energy](#), please consult our website.