

Cities and regions must be full partners of the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration



□ In this interview, [Gunārs Ansiņš](#) (LV/Renew Europe) answers four questions on the transition towards a more sustainable and efficient EU energy system. The Vice-Mayor of the Latvian city of Liepāja is the rapporteur of the [opinion on the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration](#), adopted during the 5-7 May CoR Plenary session, which calls on to the European Commission and Members States to put into place a systematic approach to involve local and regional authorities in the energy transition, in particular within the development of national energy and climate plans. Energy production and consumption account for 75% of the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. An integrated energy system is therefore crucial to delivering on the European Green Deal's objective of reaching climate neutrality by 2050.

Can the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration play a role in the economic recovery of LRAs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Is a transition towards a more integrated energy system relevant for LRAs?

The EU Strategy for Energy System Integration has a role in the economic recovery of local and regional authorities in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. In making the transition towards a more integrated energy system, it is important to set the energy-efficiency-first objective at local and regional level, taking into account the broader context of the less developed regions and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This is because energy efficiency reduces total investment and costs needed in relation to energy production, infrastructure and consumption. Likewise, it reduces the use of land and materials, as well as pollution and biodiversity loss. Energy system integration can help local and regional authorities achieve greater energy efficiency as the available resources would be used for the transition to more efficient energy technologies.

However, when developing any energy system, it should be assessed whether it would lead to lower costs for businesses and people. The energy-efficiency-first principle should aim to reduce the climate impact and increase the resource efficiency of integrated energy supply systems as well as improving efficiency for end-users. At the same time care must be taken to ensure that the transition does not go against the interests of consumers, namely that efforts to improve energy efficiency do not lead to higher energy tariffs or other costs for people and businesses without appropriate compensation.

Municipalities can be as lighthouses to show green light for even greener European Union.

What will be the role of each region's existing basic infrastructure while shifting towards high-investment energy systems?

Without taking away from innovative solutions, when integrating the energy system, it is mainly necessary to strengthen each region's existing basic infrastructure, whose strengths and advantages have been proven in practice. Given that the situations in regions vary widely in terms of climate and infrastructure, creative and smart solutions should be sought for the weak points in each region's basic infrastructure. It would be wrong to say, therefore, that the use of electricity for heating buildings should be increased in all regions, for which heat pumps are specifically recommended. District heating is highly developed in a number of countries. In Latvia, for example, it covers more than 70% of the population, and the amount of energy supplied to customers by district heating is similar to the amount of electricity consumed in Latvia. District heating can contribute by providing energy storage and power generation and by making use of energy resources that cannot be exploited at building level.

What is the real potential of offshore renewable energy?

We should use the potential of offshore renewable energy for a climate neutral future and support new offshore renewable technologies (e.g. tidal, wave and floating offshore wind and solar technologies) in a targeted manner, while at the same time supporting the EU's economic and environmental objectives. At the same time, there is a need for a clear plan to link offshore grid and offshore wind power generation directly to a cross-border interconnector in the future. Offshore energy production combined with cross-border transmission would allow significant savings in terms of costs and use of maritime space.

At the same time, green energy and biodiversity objectives should not be pitted against each other, but practical ways should be found to achieve them, thereby making it easier to realise the offshore energy potential more quickly in practice and ensuring concrete maritime spatial planning, not only in line with the biodiversity requirements, with less disruption for marine life, but also taking into account people's desire to preserve the marine landscape, the growing potential of eco-tourism and demands to preserve the attractiveness of natural surroundings.

How can methane leaks be better assessed globally?

According to the EU strategy to reduce methane emissions, the EU accounts for only 5% of global methane emissions. It can therefore be concluded that even the most ambitious EU plans to reduce methane emissions will have little impact on reducing the planet's greenhouse gas emissions. Imports of goods into the EU's single market should only be allowed from countries (or parts thereof) that provide the same standards for greenhouse gas reduction as the EU. Only in this way it will be possible to ensure that the climate targets set by the EU will not adversely affect the competitiveness of the EU and its businesses at global level.

We should urge faster detection of methane leaks both through the Copernicus programme and through other tools where the Copernicus programme is not able to provide sufficient data. It is essential to identify areas with significant methane leaks outside the EU and to make this information public,

thus enabling EU citizens to make informed choices as to whether to purchase goods produced in such locations.

Background:

The opinion '[Powering a climate-neutral economy: An EU Strategy for Energy System Integration](#)', adopted during the 144 Plenary (5-7 May 2021) of the European Committee of the Regions is a dossier of the CoR's [Green Deal Going Local](#) (GDGL) working group. Launched in [June 2020](#) and [composed of 13 local and regional elected representatives](#), the GDGL working group has the objective to guarantee that EU cities and regions are directly involved in the definition, implementation and assessment of the numerous initiatives that fall under the European Green Deal, the EU's sustainable growth strategy to reach climate-neutrality by 2050.

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[Intervention du président Charles Michel lors du sommet de financement des économies africaines à Paris](#)



On fait face, en fait, au premier choc d'ampleur mondiale depuis le XXI^e siècle, ce COVID-19 qui nous ébranle et qui nous bouscule partout dans le monde. Et c'est la raison pour laquelle, Monsieur le Président Macron, nous devons tous vous remercier pour cette initiative qui intervient à un moment particulièrement bien choisi, parce que c'est le moment ou jamais de se retrouver, de se regarder les yeux dans les yeux et de voir de quelle manière on peut aller ensemble de l'avant. Et c'est le but de cette réunion qui n'est pas une fin en soi, mais qui est, à mes yeux, plutôt un moment fondateur, un point de départ fondateur pour enclencher, je l'espère ensemble, dans le respect mutuel, dans un but mutuel, un plan d'action et de voir quelles sont les étapes que nous devons tenter de franchir ensemble.

Premier point: nous partageons des objectifs. Nous voulons de la stabilité, de la croissance, de la capacité d'enclencher plus de sécurité, plus de prospérité pour améliorer les conditions de vie. Nous partageons ce même objectif.

Deuxièmement, nous devons tenter de voir quels sont les moyens que nous pouvons ensemble mobiliser pour nous rapprocher de nos objectifs. Et on a l'occasion, lors de cette réunion qui touche au financement des économies africaines, de voir quel est le cadre sur lequel il faut travailler.

D'une part, les dettes. Beaucoup l'ont mentionné, je n'y reviens pas. Nous

devons continuer à aller de l'avant: l'enceinte du G20, l'enceinte du G7... Et vous pouvez compter sur la mobilisation politique de l'Union européenne sur ce cas, parce que nous pensons qu'il faut travailler à la restructuration des dettes pour plus de moyens.

Deux, je ne serai pas très long par rapport à cela: les droits de tirage spéciaux. Le FMI est autour de la table, les actionnaires sont présents également. Le Président Macron a affirmé une ambition très forte: 100 milliards au moins, comme première étape, doivent être mobilisés. C'est le point que nous mettons à l'agenda. Nous espérons pouvoir progresser sur ce sujet. Ce n'est pas qu'une question de montant, c'est aussi une question de modalités. Le président Sall a très bien montré les obstacles auxquels nous sommes confrontés, et auxquels vous, plus particulièrement, êtes confrontés également en termes macroéconomiques.

Troisième élément: continuer à faire de l'aide au développement, c'est ce que l'Union Européenne fait, nous sommes le premier acteur de l'aide au développement, et nous allons lors du prochain cadre financier passer de 20 milliards à 29 milliards d'euros pour le prochain cycle. C'est une manière de soutenir aussi les ambitions, les projets, les choix stratégiques portés par les leaders africains.

Et enfin, le secteur privé. Nous mesurons bien que l'argent public ne suffira pas. Il faut mobiliser les investisseurs privés, aussi les petites et moyennes entreprises. Et la présence d'institutions financières européennes, et africaines, est un signal important parce que, que doit-on faire? On doit tenter d'améliorer l'effet de levier pour attirer davantage les capacités du secteur privé d'être mobilisé, notamment sur le terrain des infrastructures. Et on doit tenter, plusieurs l'ont mis en évidence, de mieux partager les risques pour plus d'attractivité. On doit faire cela dans le souci constant, que nous partageons, de faire en sorte que chaque moyen qui est mobilisé, public et privé, soit investi vite et bien. Investir beaucoup, vite et bien: cela doit être l'objectif.

Donc vous le voyez: je pense que le sujet d'aujourd'hui, c'est le changement de logiciel. Sommes-nous prêts, face à la situation que nous connaissons, à transformer le logiciel qui fonde l'alliance, le partenariat, le New Deal, Monsieur le Président Macron, entre l'Europe et l'Afrique, et plus largement avec l'ensemble des partenaires qui sont prêts à être engagés.

Un mot rapidement sur les vaccins. C'est effectivement fondamental que l'on puisse garantir les capacités que le monde entier soit vacciné, parce que l'on ne s'en sortira que si chacun est amené à pouvoir s'en sortir. Et c'est la raison pour laquelle nous soutenons, et nous sommes prêts comme Union Européenne à y être très engagés, cette idée qui est portée notamment dans le cadre de l'OMC, cette troisième voie pour faciliter, favoriser des accès aux propriétés intellectuelles et transferts de technologies en mobilisant les secteurs publics et les secteurs privés, en Europe et en Afrique. C'est vraiment un sujet sur lequel nous devons agir vite et bien. Nous sommes prêts aussi à aller dans cette direction-là.

Voilà les quelques éléments que je voulais indiquer dans cette introduction

et en terminant par une idée, qui est une idée, en fait, africaine: le concept de l'Ubuntu. Cette idée que les destins sont liés les uns aux autres par un fil invisible qui amène à ce que nos actions individuelles ont un impact sur la société, ont un impact sur la collectivité. Et bien plus que jamais, je voudrais qu'à Paris, ce soit ce principe d'Ubuntu qui nous mobilise, qui nous guide... Et je forme le vœu que cette réunion de Paris ne soit pas un sommet comme les autres, mais qu'elle soit un point de départ, fondateur. Il y aura d'autres rendez-vous: le G7, le G20, la présidence française de l'Union européenne, le sommet entre l'Union Africaine, cher Felix Tshisekedi, et l'Union européenne, les engagements que nous allons prendre ensemble. C'est en tout cas le vœu que je formule, empreint de respect, d'écoute mutuelle et de confiance. Je suis convaincu qu'à partir de ce choc qui frappe le monde, il est possible de dessiner les contours d'un monde plus juste, d'un monde plus fort dans le cadre duquel l'Afrique à un rôle clé à jouer.

Council conclusions: Recovery and transformation of Europe's media



The Council has today approved conclusions to support the recovery and transformation of the European media sector.

The audiovisual industry and the news media sector are important economic actors with an annual turnover of €193 billion according to European Commission estimates. Both sectors have suffered during the COVID-19 crisis. Advertising revenue dropped by over 20% and Europe's cinemas incurred massive losses. That is why member states are invited to take advantage of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which is the EU's post-crisis financial instrument, and to invest in the acceleration of the digital transformation and green transition of the news media and audiovisual sectors.

The role of news media and the audiovisual industry in providing accurate information and entertainment is of great importance for Europe's democratic debate and cultural diversity. But the media and the audiovisual sector face enormous challenges such as changes to people's viewing habits and loss of advertising revenue. COVID-19 has put additional pressure on both sectors. The conclusions we adopted today set out clear steps to help them recover fast and emerge stronger from the crisis.

Graça Fonseca, Portuguese Minister of Culture

Ministers also call for efforts to make sure that the audiovisual industry

can more easily reach European and international markets and audiences. In order to boost the circulation of European content within Europe and internationally, cooperation on production and distribution needs to be facilitated. Supporting cross-border collaboration between audiovisual market actors is also key.

The Action Plan puts forward a number of initiatives to support the audiovisual and news media sectors. A planned MEDIA INVEST initiative will provide €400 million to support investment in the audiovisual industry. News media will benefit from the loans and investments of the NEWS initiative. An interactive digital tool will help media companies identify the most suitable financial support scheme.

Background and next steps

The conclusions respond to the Action Plan presented by the Commission on 3 December 2020. Its 10 concrete actions focus on three areas of activity to help the media sector recover and transform and to empower European citizens and companies.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

[Europol helps Spanish authorities break up a €26.5 million VAT fraud scheme](#)



An international law enforcement operation involving 5 countries with the support of Europol and Eurojust has resulted in the arrest of 22 suspects belonging to an organised crime group which has caused over €26.5 million in tax loss to the Spanish state budget.

On 28 April, some 24 places belonging to the crime gang were searched in a series of coordinated raids. The searches were carried out in Spain (18), the Netherlands (5) and Belgium (1). The investigators seized 16 high-end vehicles and 13 properties worth an estimated €1.3 million as well as froze a dozen of bank accounts held by these criminals in 33 different financial entities. Europol deployed its experts to Spain and the Netherlands to support the national authorities during the action day.

The syndicate used a sophisticated infrastructure to facilitate such tax evasion spread over various countries in the past year and a half. The criminals would use so-called front companies in Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Belgium and the Netherlands to pretend a trade in goods took place. In reality, no goods were delivered to enterprises in other countries, but they remained in the same Member State.

On these kind of transactions within the same country, VAT has to be paid. By pretending a trade across the EU, the VAT payment was avoided and henceforth the Spanish tax authorities defrauded upon. For these purposes, a string of shell companies had been set up and trading documents had been forged.

At request of the Spanish authorities, Eurojust organised a coordination meeting and set up a coordination centre within a few days. The Agency

coordinated the transmission of requests for European Investigation Orders (EIOs) and freezing certificates for bank accounts. Europol brought together the investigators in all 5 countries to discuss the procedural requirements and agree on a clear way forward. Its experts from Europol's European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) thereafter supporter the intense exchange of information leading to the action day.

The following countries took part in this operation:

- **Spain:** Civil Guard (Guardia Civil), National Police (Policía Nacional), Tax Agency (Agencia Tributaria)
- **The Netherlands:** Fiscal Information and Investigation Service (FIOD)
- **Belgium:** Federal Prosecution Office
- **Slovakia:** PPO Bratislava
- **Romania**

[Media advisory – Press briefing ahead of Foreign Affairs Council \(Trade\) of 20 May 2021](#)



The **press briefing** ahead of the **Foreign Affairs Council (Trade)** will take place on **Wednesday, 19 May 2021 at 17.00**.

This briefing is “off the record”.

Please note that this press briefing will take place remotely.

In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using [this link](#).

Those who already registered for previous press briefings of Trade meetings earlier this year do not need to do it again.

- **Deadline for registration: Wednesday 19 May at 16.00**

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants shortly after the deadline.

[Visit the meeting page](#)