

POLICY PAPER

A TRANSNATIONAL DEBATE

FOR A DEMOCRATIC ENERGY AND CLIMATE UNION



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The overall objective of the energy and climate union (ECU) is immense. It's nothing less than triggering a bottom-up energy transition all over Europe. Such a transition implies a real revolution of our energy system: it's not all about technologies; it's about new business models and a change of mindset. We are of the opinion that such a revolution should reach out to the 500 million citizens composing the European Union, and not be limited to a group of few people locked in offices in Brussels.

We propose the organisation of a one year public debate: from the moment the energy and climate union (ECU) document is adopted by the Commission on 25 February 2015 and until 25 February 2016, all driving forces should use the mobilisation ahead of the Paris conference to reconnect citizens and Europe in all 28 member states by initiating discussions with them on our energy and climate future.

The decisions we take now will impact some 500 million European citizens for the next century. It will change the way we consume energy (heat and electricity), the way we produce energy (decentralised generation), the way we move from places to places (especially in urban areas), and our daily lives. Broader geopolitical consequences will also be tangible for citizens: in the current context, do we really want to replace our dependence to Russia by dependence to Iran?

Unfortunately, only few attempts have been observed so far to associate citizens to the energy transition. And the current discussions around the energy and climate union as they are led so far seem once more to constitute a missed opportunity.

When the EU institutions went out of their buildings, it was to organise meaningless conferences with an audience limited to the "Brussels bubble" and with the floor given to representatives of carbon-intensive industries belonging to the past. Firstly, the conference which took place on 17 November 2014 featured two of the three keynote speakers from Eurelectric and Eurogas. At the same event, sessions on energy sources and efficiency hosted representatives from Enel, Total, the IFIEC (electro-intensive companies), Gas Naturally, GDF Suez, OMV, CEEP (pro-coal Central Europe Energy Partners)... Similarly, the Riga conference organised today and tomorrow by the Latvian presidency also very much appears as a biased exchange of views. Instead of a large democratic debate with a variety of stakeholders, here again most speakers represent fossil fuel lobbies (Eurogas), big utilities (Eurelectric), the nuclear lobby (Foratom), and the coal lobby (the so-called "zero-emission platform"). Environmental NGOs were initially not even invited. Last but not least, after taking a lovely picture together, Ministers will disappear to lock themselves in a separate room and debate about energy and climate union *in camera*.

Is that the debate we want? Do big companies have to dictate the future of the energy union?

On the contrary, we believe in the works directed by the German sociologist Claus Leggewie stating that *"the dominance of powerful institutional actors, such as transnational companies or lobbying agencies, [should] be discouraged and their influence at least made transparent"* in the ECU debate.¹ We also need to stop being too dependent on the leadership of big countries and rely more on decentralised driving forces.

Thus we recommend the design and implementation of a more transparent, systematic, and participatory debating practice during one full year. This debate should go beyond *"players already well-established in the European system"*² and reach out to citizens, consumers, remote and rural areas, islands, local public authorities, networks and coalitions... Together with Sami Andoura and Jean-Arnold Vinois from the think-tank Notre Europe, we reckon this is the condition *sine qua non* to ensure *"democratic legitimacy and public acceptance requiring to further include all stakeholders and civil society actors in the governance of the energy transition"*.³

Such inclusive debates are aimed to reinforce the *"feeling of togetherness"* and to develop *"solutions without borders by building transnational groups of common interests"*.⁴

Between 25 February 2015 and 25 February 2016, in the year of the Paris conference, we recommend the following actions to be taken:

1. Convey debates in all 28 EU member states and not in Brussels, speakers not being representatives of the big industry but local driving forces (cooperatives, networks, small cities) and revitalise the London Citizens Forum with local mirror-forums of the same kind.
2. Organise in each national and regional Parliament a large transnational event with members from other Parliaments from neighbouring countries and regions to discuss issues of common interests.
3. Mobilise city networks such as the 6000 parties to the Covenant of Mayors, Smart Cities and Communities, Energy Cities and give them the means (financial and human) to be leaders in the energy transition debates.
4. Approach initiatives such as the Belgian G1000 platform to organise citizens' panels and citizens' summits on energy throughout Europe.⁵
5. As *"energy transition is also a matter of responsibility for all individual consumers"*,⁶ develop education programmes through curricula addressing energy and climate challenges at school, and organise debates on the energy transition in all high schools and universities to raise awareness of the youngest citizens.
6. Address an annual *"State of the Energy Union"*⁷ to all citizens, a process driven by the European Commission with the active contribution of other institutions and networks.
7. Develop and put online an interactive website, use social networks and blogs to talk about the energy transition and collect views.
8. Implement these recommendations in a year time frame, so that the Dutch presidency can take stock of the transnational discussions during the first semester of 2016 and subsequently propose future actions.

To conclude, it is of our opinion that citizens will not accept an energy union as a "fait accompli" aiming to build more gas pipelines. They want an energy and climate union to shift to a democratic, sustainable, resilient energy system. The least we can do is to let them speak up!

Contact

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¹ *Let's work together! A manifesto for an European Community for Energy Transition*, supervised by Pr. Dr. Claus Leggewie (to be published).

² Sami Andoura and Jean-Arnold Vinois, *From the Energy Community to the Energy Union*, Notre Europe / Jacques Delors Institute, January 2015.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Let's work together!*, *op. cit.*

⁵ <http://www.g1000.org/en/index.php>

⁶ Sami Andoura and Jean-Arnold Vinois, *op. cit.*

⁷ *Ibid.*