

‘Local authorities volunteer to achieve EU energy and climate goals’

organized by Energie-Cités and the Committee of the Regions within the Open Days 2007 event, with the participation of the European Commission and the European Parliament representatives

Presentation of Mr Alfonso González Finat, The European Commission



We must be well aware of the ambitious objectives of the new Energy Policy for Europe that was approved this year: 20% of renewables, 20% less CO₂ emitted to the atmosphere, 20% more energy efficiency.

The EC endeavours to do its job to achieve those objectives. A few weeks ago a new package on the electricity and gas markets was approved by the Commission; before the end of this year the Commission will propose a new framework directive for renewables. On the other hand, the recently approved Green Paper on urban transport shows how energy is a major concern in this sector. An

Energy technology plan must be presented at the end of the year.

In order to succeed achieving our objectives, in order to win our fight against climate change, we absolutely need the active involvement of the local actors.

We, as citizens, are responsible for most of the energy consumption. Our energy problem comes fundamentally from our individual patterns of behaviour, from how we decide to live, to work, to move, to purchase. In order to change our behaviour, to take more intelligent decisions, we need that the public powers that are closer to us, the local authorities, support us and give us not only an example, but also an illusion, a project for the future. Only by acting locally will we be able to reach the citizen, to get a real change for good in our attitudes and behaviours related to energy.

Cities use around 75% of the total energy demand and, directly and indirectly, generate 75% of the CO₂ emissions. Bearing this in mind, the EU Action Plan for Energy Efficiency, approved late in 2006, included as a key action to launch an ambitious initiative addressed towards the cities: the Covenant of Mayors.

The idea of a Covenant of Mayors is in essence a proposal of an alliance between the European Commission and the cities of Europe that commit, within the scope of the competences, to match or go beyond the EU objectives in terms of reduction of their CO₂ emissions by the year 2020. By doing that, the Covenant cities will convey a clear message to their citizens, and share with them a compromise for our future, and will show the way to other cities in Europe and beyond.

The Covenant is intended to start with a limited number of pioneer cities, those already convinced of the need to proceed decisively, and of the benefits that derive from early action, but will be open to all cities that decide to commit for the task at any time later.

The Commission will publicly recognise and support those brave cities that show their commitment. We expect that, as the Covenant is taking shape and incorporating new cities more and more examples of smart actions will be available to other cities. The Commission will also put at the disposal of the cities in the Covenant the wealth of expertise and knowledge created in the framework of the Concerto and Civitas activities, the Intelligent Energy Europe programme, the ManagEnergy and Sustenergy initiatives, and will endeavour to attract other poles of excellence, such as the networks dealing with energy education, public-private



European Week of Regions and Cities
Brussels
8 – 11 October 2007

partnerships, performance contracting, etc. into the scheme. Other elements may need to be introduced as we work out the detail of the Covenant. For instance, it looks highly convenient to initiate a dialogue with the financial entities, and to explore the ways of getting them on board in the Covenant and facilitating loans for the necessary investments. The Covenant is built around the cities and their Mayors, but could also invite other stakeholders willing to co-operate.

We really hope that this initiative will help the cities to convey to the citizen a message of hope and resolution in the fight against climate change. The combination of a simple objective, reducing our CO₂ emissions, shared by a number of cities, and the public recognition of those cities as examples of excellence, can be a decisive step in paving the way for a brighter future.

As the objective is quantified, to reduce CO₂ emissions by, say, more than 30% in 12 years, the local authorities will dispose of a clear reference to present their political initiatives to their citizens, who may feel more prone to the commitment, and proud of their city.

The Commission proposes to work out the details of the Covenant in close and informal co-operation with the cities and their representative networks. This is an excellent occasion to start with. If the Covenant of Mayors is a success, it will contribute decisively to the limitation of CO₂ emissions, not only because of the sheer capacity of the cities to accomplish it but also because the excellent example of commitment and resolution shown by the pioneering cities will for sure mobilise the rest of the society. The Commission has launched the idea and will be the merit of the cities and their Mayors. Now it is up to us, the cities and the Commission, to work it out for the good of our society.