



European Committee
of the Regions

SPEECH BY 1ST VICE PRESIDENT TZITZIKOSTAS

COVENANT OF MAYORS

30 MARCH 2023 – 9H30 – CHARLEMAGNE BUILDING

Dear Commissioner, dear colleagues,

In the last year,
Regardless of skyrocketing energy prices and high inflation,
local and regional authorities have continued
to provide essential services,
and have taken measures
to **strengthen energy resilience**.

With the recent crisis,
energy poverty became a new emergency to fight.
This is not a new problem,
as it is the result of a very slow implementation of
transition policies and actions.

To address this rising challenge,
We stress the need to accelerate **the energy transition**.
What we need now in particular
is to accelerate the adoption of the remaining legislative
proposals of the *Fit for 55* package,
and ensure that EU legislation is up to the current challenges:
the role of the Swedish Presidency in this is key.

The European Committee of the Regions has been very active in the last year: we issued a resolution on REPowerEU, we developed opinions on major files of the *Fit for 55* packages, and we also called for a **European Energy Union** with a fully integrated and interconnected market across the EU.

Not only have we been very active on the legislative side: we have also developed our **Green Deal Going Local initiative**, supporting cities and regions in speeding up the Green Deal implementation on the ground.

Dear colleagues,

The recent energy crisis has shown how important **multilevel governance cooperation** is.

Over the last years, many cities and regions have adopted **more ambitious targets than their national governments** in their national energy and climate plans.

The revision of the National Climate and Energy Plans in 2023 provides a unique opportunity for the **active involvement of local and regional authorities in climate and energy governance**, we said this at the last COP in Sharm el Sheik:

we hope now that all National Climate and Energy Plans will fully implement the **Multilevel Climate and Energy Dialogues**, as it is foreseen in the Governance of the Energy Union.

Many Covenant's signatories like Valencia in Spain, Espoo and Lathi in Finland, Gabrovo in Bulgaria, and Budapest in Hungary have taken strong **local commitments** to become climate neutral, **moving faster** than their respective national states.

And this is encouraging. This is why we call for the inclusion of **local and regional actions** in the National Climate and Energy Plans, as they can further support the plans developed in the Covenant.

Let me now focus on some specific regions:

in comparison with mainland regions, islands have features that are unique to them. Many islands have still isolated and weak energy networks, forcing them to rely on imported fossil fuels making their decarbonisation more difficult.

There, when phasing out fossil fuels is vital, it is imperative to foster **energy efficiency** and **support a higher renewable penetration** in islands, as well as in peripheral and outermost regions. This could be achieved thanks to the abundance of renewable energy sources that often characterizes these territories.

But there are still many technical and economic barriers to this, including:

- complex and lengthy permitting and authorisation procedures;
- lack of coordination between energy grid;
- constraints issues related to storage.

We therefore need to increase specific island-related supporting instruments, like the **Clean Energy for EU Islands initiative** if we really want to accelerate the energy transition of islands. This is important to us, as we want to leave no one, no territory behind.

Moreover, our action on islands is meaningful, not only because it impacts more than 17 million Europeans, but also because islands are **living-labs**, the most affected territories of coast erosion and other negative effects of climate change:

they offer a naturally privileged observatory to measure the efficiency of our actions, including for mitigation and prevention.

Let me conclude by assuring that the Covenant has created a **powerful political movement**.

Its success has inspired many EU initiatives for cities and regions.

Its model has been proposed also to our allies beyond the EU borders, as we are all called to fight the same issues.

This has created a common language, shared objectives, new partnerships, and a **positive trend** that shows

the importance of **local actions**
for the Green Deal implementation.

However, the need to overcome the triple planetary crisis -
climate change,
pollution
and biodiversity loss,
coupled with the energy crisis,
has changed the context in which we operate today.

There is a clear need today
to develop a **new set of supporting instruments**
and to accelerate their uptake at the local level.

This could be achieved with
a better harmonisation,
further simplification,
and more alignment with
changing needs that local and regional authorities
are dealing with
in the different EU energy and climate initiatives.

The Covenant plays a central driving role in this process.

**Let's face it: 2050 Green Deal objectives
will not be achieved
if we don't move quickly into implementation.**

In this context, we need to secure the support
to local and regional authorities
with funding and innovative investment mobilisation strategies.

**And I call for a further linkage
between the initiatives of the Covenant**

and the cohesion funds,

which are the only instruments available to all the EU's regions, bringing a long-term vision and investment plans for sustainable development,

and which are shaped from the bottom-up.

Dear colleagues,

we can **impact globally**

by **acting locally,**

starting with the implementation of the green transition on the ground.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY