



The President's Office

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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**Keynote speech by the
President of the Committee of the Regions
Mrs Mercedes Bresso**

6th Annual Brussels Climate Change Conference
**Climate change and cities: How the EU can assist local and urban
governments in their efforts to address climate change**
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Disclaimer: Check against delivery

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to warmly welcome you to the Committee of the Regions.

Commissioner (Günther) Oettinger,

it is a real pleasure to share the keynote address with you.

Energy policy is a key driver for Europe 2020.

It is an ambitious strategy, whose goals are in our reach if we engage cities and regions - **just as the Covenant of Mayors is doing.**

Today, I would like to focus my address on three aspects of EU policies for energy and climate action:

1. why "going local" is essential;
2. the kind of EU policy we need;
3. how to get the best out of the Covenant of Mayors.

My first point: going local on climate and energy action.

Both climate and energy are global issues, and this requires that Europe develop a bold policy and play a leading international role.

In this regard, the Union is not only the place to shape commitments by striking a balance between national positions.

A bold Union must also transform commitments into action - in everyday life in each and every one of our regions and cities.

Indeed, global issues are daily challenges for local politicians.

We have to adapt our social services as summers become increasingly hot. We have to intervene when natural disasters strike our communities. We must face floods and droughts and their consequences for agriculture and tourism.

However, "by going local" the Union can also exercise strong leverage.

In fact, local and regional authorities account for:

- more than 30% of total public expenditure,
- more than 25% of total tax revenue,
- 65% of public investment in the EU.

They enforce 70% of EU legislation.

Cities and regions can therefore boost renewable energies and energy efficiency in different ways:

- via green public procurement
- ...and fiscal incentives to businesses and families;
- via public investment in carbon-free technologies
- ... and enforcement of energy efficiency rules;
- via mobilisation of citizens
- ... and "green" public-private partnerships.

While we need a geo-political approach to energy, including the question of security and diversification of supply, **Europe must also strongly root its "energy shift" within our local economic and social fabric.**

Finding a balance between the two is, I believe, the right EU policy mix for energy and climate, which is my second point.

In this regard, we welcome the fact that the European Commission has adopted **"A Resource-efficient Europe"** among its first **Flagship Initiatives**. As follow-up, we also look forward to considering your communications on the **European Energy Efficiency Plan 2020** as well as the **Roadmaps 2050 on Energy and Low Carbon Economy**.

The Committee will put forward proposals on this matter. We will not build our position from scratch, since this discussion closely interlinks with other key debates, such as that on the future Multiannual Financial Framework and that on ensuring territorial cohesion within all European policies.

Indeed, the Committee strongly believes that **mainstreaming energy efficiency and climate action within major territorial policies**, such as cohesion policy, is a better solution than creating separate policy funds. At the request of the Commission, we will be delivering an **outlook opinion** on this subject in the near future.

That said, we must ensure that certain conditions are satisfied, three of which I would like to stress:

1. **effective enforcement of mainstreaming** through enhanced cooperation both within the Commission and at Member State and regional and local level;
2. **creation of Europe 2020 Project Bonds** to support long-term investment in the field of energy networks and infrastructure;
3. **support for experimentation and pilot projects** by providing European seed funding and technical assistance to new energy applications.

This leads me to my last point:

how to make the best use of the Covenant of Mayors.

So far, the Covenant of Mayors has been a success story,

since it is translating a European political agenda into, firstly, political commitments at local level,

then into Sustainable Energy Action Plans,

and, in some cases, into practical projects on the ground.

And it is doing all this by shaping a truly European community of best practices.

What started as a pilot scheme has rapidly become a model of governance for other policies, as recognised by President Barroso.

After a successful start-up and expansion, the Covenant needs to be consolidated through practical implementation. Failure to do so would ultimately undermine the credibility of Europe in the eyes of the cities and regions.

Indeed, we all want the Covenant to become more robust.

To this end, the Committee is ready to further **reinforce the political partnership** with the European Commission and the Covenant stakeholders.

Together, we can further develop our vision and roadmap for the Covenant. Without being exhaustive, we could have a fresh and realistic look at questions such as:

1. How to reinforce political ownership and governance of our partnership?
2. What mechanisms are needed to ensure more coherence in policy delivery and funding between the Covenant and major EU policies, such as cohesion?
3. Can the scope of the Covenant be extended to other policies within sustainable development?
4. How can we better lever public-private partnerships?
5. How can the external dimension of the Covenant be strengthened?

In fact, our Covenant is becoming a success story around the world.

Commissioner Oettinger, let me mention just one example.

In the framework of the cooperation agreement between the US Conference of Mayors and our Committee, we have learned that the Northern Virginia Regional Commission is adopting a new energy plan which is inspired by the **Stuttgart Region**, thus generating economic returns for German business.

The Committee has already received similar expressions of interest from Indian mayors. Other calls for cooperation are coming from the

Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, the Mediterranean Basin and so on and so forth.

Ladies and gentleman,

A low-carbon economy is not just about a technological shift.

It is a change of attitude, which requires bottom-up action.

Let's work together to exploit the potential of the Covenant of Mayors to the full!