

WHAT CITIZEN DIALOGUES FOR WHAT TYPE OF ENERGY TRANSITION?

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Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised on 14 May 2013, with the support of the MACIF, in the framework of the French national debate on the energy transition, a conference entitled “Energy transition and public dialogues : national and European perspectives”. It aimed at presenting a proposal for European dialogues on energy, stressing the importance of the European component of the energy transition, and reinforcing the civil society participation in the national and European energy politics governance, so as to achieve a European Energy Community.

In the context of the energy transition France has launched an ambitious consultation process meant at shaping a future major energy and climate law. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute* have therefore seized the opportunity to establish links between a practical and innovative example of broad civil society consultation at national level and the vision of public engagement as they see it.

This conference aimed to show public dialogue’s added value in policy-making – as France conceives it – and to assess the EESC’s ideas and recommendations in terms of public engagement in particular its European dimension. This event gave the opportunity to discuss a real-size public engagement process meant at directly feeding back into national draft legislation whilst bringing European added value to the French debate. It also exemplified the EESC’s vision of a European energy dialogue (EED). This conference created a fertile interaction between a national – French – level and the European level. Ideally it could kick start an on-going civil society dialogue in the EU, aiming at replication of such debate in other member states.



1. National and European energy dialogues: involving civil society for a successful energy policy

Participants stated that a dialogue between, from one side the national authorities, and from the other side citizens is often missing in the EU. They do not always understand that the energy transition is an on-going process that substantially impacts on the questions of climate change, electricity prices, energy import dependency or energy poverty. The reasons why public engagement is so important for energy policy were thoroughly discussed. The awareness and understanding of citizens regarding energy transition can facilitate policy choices of decision makers. For example, the commitment and implication of citizens at the local level create favourable conditions for policy making in support to decentralised sources of energy, energy efficiency or collaborative project investment (via e.g. “crowd funding”).

It makes citizens more involved and responsible for national energy security. The debate with citizens on such essential topics for their life can also refresh democratic values in the European and national policies enhancing participatory democracy before the European elections in 2014.

Regarding the approach of involving civil society all agreed that dialogues on energy should take place in all member states however taking into consideration the European dimension.



Among others the latter is deemed necessary to ensure cross-border infrastructures, which is a pre-condition to a functional single energy market in the EU.

The discussions with civil society should be structured and follow effective methodologies. They should touch upon topics close to everyday life of citizens so as to create interest and motivation from their side. There are many key challenges to be discussed with the citizens: e.g. the cost of the different sources of energy, the cost of an enhanced grid, the impact of energy transition on the competitiveness of industry and its delocalisation outside Europe, or the link between energy and climate change.

The framework for these debates ought to create a democratic arena, a “safe space” where citizens can express themselves and get more knowledge. At the European level the response, as proposed by the EESC, could be the creation of a **European Energy Dialogue (EED)** which would set the framework and principles for debates at all levels: European, national, regional and local. The EED is a public engagement and involvement programme meant to go beyond existing and often insufficient consultation processes and be an inclusive, transparent, trustworthy and co-ordinated multi-level conversation within and across all member states.

The EED will promote understanding, stimulate practical action and have a measurable influence on energy policy-making by stimulating convergence at EU level, in particular as a way to optimise energy provision, costs and climate objectives. It will deliver public ownership of the indispensable legislative, regulatory, technology, societal and behavioural developments to prepare for the energy transition. The EED will involve citizens, civil society organisations, national and local authorities and all types of

energy organisations. It will combine national and European perspectives with a view to bringing operational added-value to policy making and implementation. Actions must be carried out at national/regional level but take account of the broader (European) picture. The EED will encourage discussion of how far sometimes conflicting goals – secure, sustainable, safe, competitive and affordable energy – can be reconciled.

2. What future for European energy policy in transition?

Providing a European perspective to the energy policy is clearly very important for the success of the energy transition according to the Danish and French ministers of Energy Mr Martin Lidegaard and Ms Delphine Batho¹ as well as for Mr Fabrizio Barbasso, representing the European Commission. In addition to national efforts, it is essential to e.g. modernise and further develop the EU energy grid, achieve a fully integrated and competitive EU energy market, make sure capacity mechanisms are harmonised, coordinate big research projects, improve the ETS system and possibly agree on common targets for CO₂, renewable energy sources and/or energy efficiency for 2030. All these issues are EU relevant.

One of the main challenges for facilitating the energy transition is to enhance the cooperation between member states and coordinate their national policies in order to optimise resources. The best solution would be to get support of all member states for this policy instead of creating “a two speed-energy Europe” via the enhanced cooperation. The Danish Energy minister Mr Lidegaard stressed the success factors for an effective Renewable Energy Sources (RES) support policy such as less generous support schemes going in pair with a stable EU energy policy and a more coordinated EU planning stimulating the development of renewables throughout Europe and not only where subsidies exist.



Among the key messages of the conference, many insisted to say that **the energy transition** in the whole European continent could **be a major source of growth and jobs** and provide an adequate response to the current crisis. According to Ms Batho and other participants the EU should come back to the origin of its creation with energy as a factor of peace and prosperity, and launch a European Energy Community², an objective which the *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute* and the EESC are actively promoting.

3. Civil society's contributions to the French debate on the energy transition

The French debate was received positively but some considered it to be too short in time, with too few citizens involved and with too strict framework defined by authorities. The contributions revealed that more debate should be organised at the regional level which should be the principal actor in energy transition. The authorities are expected to make proper impact assessment before making any decisions. To the credit of the French authorities, organising effective public debates was recognised being not an easy exercise. There are the challenges to mobilise enough committed participants and to show the opportunities and risks for each actor in a relatively easy way.

One of the principal messages of this debate is that collective choices should be made regarding the expansion of renewables as it faces public acceptance problems in certain localities. The participants saw also difficulties in planning energy policy in the long term as in general the political system in France is not geared to such a long time perspective. Finally the French debate appeared to avoid discussing nuclear energy although it is an important element of low carbon energy system.



4. Strengthening civil society's involvement in the governance of European energy policy: coordinating national efforts at EU level

The experience of debates on energy policy is very differentiated in EU member states. In **Germany** *Agora Energiewende* is based on the large support of the German Parliament and citizens. The discussion went beyond the acceptance of energy transition towards the topic of energy grid on which public consultation takes place. Similar to Denmark the ownership of energy production creates a new stakeholder group of "involved citizens."

The **Spanish Energy Mix Forum (SEMF)** is a bottom-up process which succeeded in stimulating the dialogue on all sources of energy according to a "total energy system" approach, open to all stakeholders, transversal and rigorous. The weakness of SEMF is that national authorities accept it but hardly listen or follow it. The promoters stated the lack of participatory culture in Spain, very few involvement processes of citizens by authorities and scarce resources.

The **Polish authorities** face similar difficulties, with the culture of multi-stakeholder dialogue still largely missing in Poland. Yet, contrary to Spain, the authorities are the promoters of punctual debates on energy issues. It is however very difficult to find a consensus as differences between stakeholders are huge.

The representative of the Commission stated that national forums should be organised before the European debate takes place. The EU institutions normally involve citizens via public consultations, discussions with various stakeholders and supporting several forums on energy. Many participants called for more involvement of media and in particular social media in the debates.

The Energy ministers and the European Commission much supported the involvement of civil society and citizens in the debates on energy policy. In Denmark the involvement of citizens is assured via their ownership of energy projects. The European Commission offered its cooperation to the EESC in order to make progress on the EED.

Conclusion - Towards a European Energy Community: competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, and solidarity that unites

In the concluding session, Mr Henri Malosse, the EESC President, stressed that the “European project” should be better connected to citizens in order to remedy the current democratic deficit and the distrust to the European Union. Public engagement is a very important step in this process. However the dialogue with citizens should be made credible which implies among others that the consultations are organised before political decisions are taken.

Mr Malosse emphasized that the objectives of energy independency and fighting energy poverty should be equally important as the one of energy transition. He called for more common EU vision on energy policy and cooperation among member states which is an idea shared with Mr Jacques Delors, Founding president of *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*.

Mr Sami Andoura, senior research fellow at *Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, stressed the opportunities offered by the macro-regional cooperation in the EU among neighbouring countries in the field of energy. Finally, the Common declaration on “Energy transition and public dialogues: national and European perspectives” was presented and signed by Mr Malosse and Mr Andoura (on behalf of Mr Delors).



1. Delphine Batho was replaced on 2 July 2013 as minister for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy by Philippe Martin.
2. Sami Andoura, Leigh Hancher and Marc Van der Woude, “Towards a European Energy Community: A Policy Proposal”, *Studies and Research No. 76, Notre Europe*, March 2010.

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