

Innovative financing of energy efficiency projects, Remote, 13 May 2021

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to open this Conference and to present the Congress' point of view today.

I am the spokesperson on Climate Change and the Environment at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

The Congress is the pan-European forum of elected local and regional politicians from the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. In this role our members contribute to the implementation of several of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Conferences like this are an opportunity to share inspiration and to be concrete. Here, we can discuss *how* exactly we are going to bring about the energy transition and how we are going to finance it.

At the Congress, we are convinced that the local and regional levels are crucial to overcome the challenges posed by climate change.

Almost three quarters of Europe's population is urban. A big share of our environmental impact is, therefore, also generated in towns and cities.

As all of you know, a key component of the ecological transition is the energy transition. And it goes without saying that cities consume, by far, most of the energy. It is about 75% globally.

But as a local elected representative myself, I can also tell you that cities are the greatest levers in the efforts to fight and mitigate climate change.

National and international climate plans can only be successful if cities and regions are included in all stages – from planning to implementation.

Local politicians are at the frontline. We face the worst impacts of climate change. Therefore, we will also need to be the ones implementing the enormous transformations to come.

The Congress is aware of the importance of cities in building a sustainable future. **That is why we have made “Sustainable Societies” one of our key priorities for 2021-2026.**

On the one hand, when we talk about sustainability, we of course talk about combatting climate change. The Congress can act as a platform for city councillors from across Europe to discuss local climate action. Coordination, co-operation and exchanges of good practices regarding climate change are essential. They help multiply the effect of local measures.

On the other hand, Congress also addresses digitalisation when talking about sustainable societies. Indeed, we can use digitalisation to speed up Europe’s energy transition. The use of new technologies will allow us to increase efficiency and manage energy supply through infrastructures like [smart grids](#). Innovation and digitalisation will also help us develop new systems to generate renewable energy. This is the way to go if our cities are to become carbon neutral.

Ladies and gentlemen,

[Tapez ici]

It is clear that cities and regions will be crucial to put in place the energy transition. As local elected representatives, we have to set a good example in terms of sustainability and energy performance.

We should make sure that our own buildings are renovated and well-isolated. We can modernise public transport, for example by introducing electric busses. We can also provide training, give energy-efficiency certifications, and give funding to citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises to optimise their energy efficiency.

Allow me to share with you the example from my municipality, Kočevje which is the largest municipality in the Republic of Slovenia with an area of 555 km² and 16,000 inhabitants. Since as much as 80% of the area is covered by forests and we want to preserve the otherwise unspoiled nature, the basic starting point in our municipality is the implementation of measures for sustainable energy production.

The district wood biomass heating system, which we are upgrading with cogeneration capacities, completely replaced the former heating with heating oil. The system is constantly expanded, as we always connect new users to it. The connection of our industrial zone to this system is especially important, thus relieving the CO₂ emissions of our local businesses.

As Kočevje is considered to be an average developed municipality in Slovenia, we decided on a system of positive discrimination that rests upon additional incentives for those who decide to install solar panels, heat pumps, reduce energy consumption of buildings or decide to install solar heating systems. All these funds are provided by the municipal budget.

Through these measures, we have reduced CO₂ emissions in our municipality by 16,000 tons per year over the last 10 years. The most important consequence of this kind of action was the formation of a common consensus and awareness of social activation and an understanding of co-responsibility in tackling environmental challenges.

However, local authorities cannot bear all of the burden. Our time and resources are limited. We need all levels of government to do their part too, and we need adequate resources to be able start the energy transition at local level.

But above all, we need *all* stakeholders to be involved. We have to make sure that this transition is fair and inclusive. It is absolutely crucial that citizens be included in decision making. They should be at the heart of local energy plans, as they should be at the heart of all our policies.

If we do so, everyone will be able to benefit from the energy transition. If we don't, we risk deepening inequalities or creating new ones.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to an interesting conference.