

Sustainable Energy Week: The shape of things to come

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Interviews

Romania's Minister for Energy, Anton Anton, believes Europe's capacity for economic growth is inseparable from its energy reform programme



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During EUSEW2019, stakeholders will discuss “shaping Europe’s energy future”. How will Europe’s energy future look and how should it be shaped?

I believe that Europe’s energy future is already being shaped by the recently agreed EU legislative framework for 2030.

We need to continue our collective efforts to implement the Energy Union Strategy.

Europe’s energy future need to be oriented towards citizens and business, while ensuring an affordable, safe, competitive, secure and sustainable energy system.

The growth and competitiveness of the economy are inseparable from the development and modernisation of the energy system.

This should be based on innovative technologies, digitisation, sector coupling and sector integration.

Moreover, modernising the energy system will require substantial private and public investment.

However, whilst pursuing these goals, we should also prioritise the issue of energy poverty and vulnerable consumers, making sure that the energy transition is fair and just and that no one is left behind.

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Europe's energy markets remain mostly national in nature. Is the lack of an overarching regulatory framework for energy markets, a challenge in delivering sustainable and renewable energy?

The EU aims to fully integrate national energy markets in order to provide consumers and businesses improved services and products in a more competitive and secure environment.

Over time, the EU has improved the regulatory framework for energy markets.

I believe therefore that the new framework – the 2030 energy and climate objectives and Electricity Market Design – creates both opportunities and challenges for Member States; they need to consider their national specificities and to adapt their systems in order to meet the transition goals.

“It is important to acknowledge that we are currently at a crucial moment, one where we have to take clear, long-term, predictable and considered decisions for the future development of the EU's energy system”

Romania is a European leader in hydroelectric power production but has an underdeveloped wind and solar sector. What kind of energy mix is Romania pursuing for the future?

Romania is one of the few Member States with a balanced and diversified energy mix.

Over the time, Romania has invested and supported the development of renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, biomass and hydro.

The green certificate support scheme implemented in 2008-2016 saw the rapid development of renewable energy production capacities.

In 2016 in Romania, the share of energy from renewable sources in the gross final consumption was 25 percent, exceeding the 24 percent target set for 2020.

According to recent data, currently certified producers of electricity from renewable energy sources have a total installed capacity of almost 5000 MW, of which more than 60 percent is produced by wind turbines, 27 percent by photovoltaic panels, seven percent by hydro power plants under 10MW and the remainder from biomass, biogas and waste gas.

The current energy mix ensures a reasonable level of energy security at national and regional level.

Maintaining the current level of diversity of internal sources is therefore a priority objective for 2021-2030.

Since the Paris climate change agreement, where do you believe the EU has made progress in cutting carbon emissions and what further challenges need to be overcome?

The new policy framework created by adopting the Clean Energy Package brings regulatory certainty, in particular by introducing the first national energy and climate plans for 2021-2030.

These will boost cooperation between Member States and collective efforts in achieving the EU's 2030 energy and climate targets.

It is well-known that in the energy sector we have to plan now for what we want to see in place in the coming decades.

Under the Romanian Presidency, we organised wide-ranging debates in different Council formations on the EU long-term vision that will provide a long-term perspective and set long-term objectives.

We need this vision because we need to send credible political signals to support this process, including the specific instruments to achieve it.

Involving stakeholders and transparent planning processes and targeted public spending - including EU funds - will be important stepping stones. We need the support of all citizens for a successful transition.

“The growth and competitiveness of the economy are inseparable from the development and modernisation of the energy system”

What will be the Council's sustainable energy priorities be for the remainder of the Romanian presidency and for the Finnish presidency of the EU, and can Europe reduce emissions earlier than 2050?

Currently, the focus of the Romanian Presidency, from a non-legislative perspective, is to adopt a set of Council Conclusions on the future of energy systems in the Energy Union designed to ensure the energy transition, and the achievement of energy and climate objectives, for 2030 and beyond.

The aim is to have these adopted on the occasion of the Energy Council on 25 June 2019.

The focus will be on developing interconnected, reliable and cost-effective networks, on developing innovative technologies as well as on sector coupling and sector integration.

It is important to acknowledge that we are currently at a crucial moment, one where we have to take

clear, long-term, predictable and considered decisions for the future development of the EU's energy system.

The 2015 Paris Agreement marked the moment when the international community committed to decisive climate action to keep global warming well below 2° Celsius and to pursuing a limit of 1.5° Celsius.

To achieve climate neutrality will require transformational change for all countries.

About the author

Anton Anton is Romanian Minister for Energy, whose country holds the presidency of the EU Council

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