



## **Answer of the Committee C “Regional policies” of the Assembly of European Regions**

To the Green Paper on Energy ‘A European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy’ (COM(2006) 105 final)

*Adopted by the AER ‘Regional Policies’ committee members, at their plenary meeting on 2 October 2006 in Strasbourg (F)*

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### **The members of the ‘Regional Policies’ Committee of the Assembly of European Regions (AER),**

*Considering the energy and political challenges that Europe is facing, caused by its continuing dependence on petrol and gas, of which resources are diminishing whereas demand is rising, and with regards to the countries exporting fossil fuels, that are often on the verge of political instability*

*Considering the increasing damage to the environment, and its harmful impact on health, due to the consumption of polluting energy resources, and to an inappropriate management of energy*

*Considering the harmful impact of Europe’s energy dependence on its socio-economic fabric, which notably increases the energy bills for both enterprises as consumers*

*Considering their own experience in this area, the work done on renewable energies and energy efficiency carried out within their Committee since 2005,*

*Having regard to the limited response platform offered through the questionnaire of the Commission about the Green Paper on Energy (COM(2006)105 final)*

**Have decided not to use this questionnaire but to adopt the following position on the European Commission’s Green Paper on Energy :**

#### **Introductory remarks:**

**The regions that are members of the « Regional Policies » Committee of the Assembly of European Regions,**

1. Welcome the growing interest that the European Commission puts forward in its Green Paper for the energy problems threatening the European Union and Europe in general; this interest shows a certain awareness and political will to face the political, environmental and socio-economic challenges related to dependence and over-consumption of energy

2. Share the European Commissions' opinion on the necessity to adopt « one common European response »<sup>1</sup> and « integrate »<sup>2</sup> it in the energy challenges
3. Express moreover their agreement with the principles that must be at the heart of the proposed strategy i.e. the key words, « sustainable, competitive and secure »<sup>3</sup>, underlining that these principles must also be fundamental to the strategies of the Member States and the Regions
4. Welcome the multilateral approach of the Commission to the energy issue; it consists notably, in addition to a rational energy management approach, as already suggested in the Green Paper on energy efficiency in 2005<sup>4</sup>, a diversification of energy resources, innovation and the establishment of a single electricity market
5. Regret nevertheless the limited position given by the Commission to the promotion of Renewable Energy Sources (RES); While it is clear at the moment that RES cannot totally replace hydrocarbon energy, the Regions insist that RES are crucial to ensure “sustainable, competitive and secure” energy
6. Indeed point out that Renewable Energy Sources are at the same time;
  - Renewable, and thus sustainable, where the reliance on fossil fuels diminishes
  - Competitive and secure, in particular if they are produced and available on a local and regional level, avoiding excessive transport and storage costs and risks

As a consequence, RES must be a major element of the European strategy on energy

7. Are surprised by the near absence of regional actors and their representative organisations in the propositions put forward by the European Commission
8. Doubt the feasibility of launching an effective European strategy as is proposed by the Commission if this strategy essentially relies on the co-operation and willingness of Member States, whose interests are not always convergent, as is demonstrated with the recent frictions following the merger between two energy companies
9. Point out that the absence of regional stakeholders is regrettable as many problems stemming from energy dependence find their solution at a local and regional level, Point out that the absence of regional stakeholders is regrettable as many problems stemming from energy dependency find their solution at a local and regional level, which favour the use of diverse and renewable energy sources and promote awareness among citizen towards a responsible consumption of energy
10. Assert that in order to favour the use of diverse and renewable energy sources, in the context of the subsidiarity principle, local and regional authorities have a key role to play
11. Stress that their closer position to the citizens allows Regions to better communicate and promote awareness among the public towards a responsible consumption of energy
12. Underline, in this context, that the regions have proved that they for long have taken strong and diverse initiatives to improve their energy strategies and have a large capacity for innovation in energy matters, and that their representative interregional organisations, the first being the AER, offer a platform for the exchange and dissemination of these best practices

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<sup>1</sup> Green Paper on a European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy,p.4

<sup>2</sup> Green Paper on a European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy,p.10

<sup>3</sup> Green Paper on a European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy,p.4

<sup>4</sup> Green Paper on Energy efficiency or doing more with less - 2005

13. Affirm, as a consequence, that the key role that regional actors, like their representative organisations, play to implement a European strategy on energy must be better acknowledged, if this strategy is to be successful.

**Requests:**

With regard to the aforementioned remarks, the Regions call on the European Commission for:

**1. A stronger commitment to the promotion of RES in the Energy mix, through:**

- Inscription, in the Renewable Energy Road Map<sup>5</sup>, of clear and quantified targets with regards to the proportion of RES in the energy consumption **until 2020**, in order to create and maintain an even more secure environment for investments in this area and to give a lever for regional actors to include energy projects in their negotiations with national governments
- **A systematic use of the rules for European competition<sup>6</sup>**, in order to ensure the establishment of one European electricity market, to face the administrative barriers and to ensure equitable circumstances for the development of green electricity

In this respect, the AER member regions insist that this must involve long-term planning and secure provision of energy. All EU citizens should have an equal access to clean energy sources and this gives Regions the possibility to support and develop projects to achieve this goal.

- **Improved financial support** for projects in the field of RES, above all with regards to future programmes that focus on research and development and competitiveness and innovation i.e. FP7 and the CIP of which the programme and the indicative budget still need to be formally adopted
- The creation of **European technological platforms** in the field of Renewable Energies
- The rapid publication of **a directive on heating and air-conditioning derived from renewable energy sources**, like is asked for by the European Parliament through the adoption of a report by Mrs Rothe (MEP) with recommendations for the Commission to work on heating and cooling from renewable sources of energy on 14 February 2006

A directive on heating and cooling derived from RES will **substantially contribute to "securing European energy supplies and to significantly reduce Europe's dependence on oil and gas in particular"**<sup>7</sup>. It also proposes measures to reduce the administrative barriers to the use of renewable heating and cooling. **The AER member regions strongly encourage the Commission to take the recommendations adopted by the European Parliament into account** when creating the directive.

<sup>5</sup> Green Paper on a European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy, p.12

<sup>6</sup> AER Response to the White Paper Services of General Interest

<sup>7</sup> Report with recommendations to the Commission on heating and cooling from renewable sources of energy (2005/2122(INI)), Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, Ref. FINAL A6-0020/2006

**2. The acknowledgement of the key role that regional actors and their representative organisations, like the AER, can play in the implementation of a European strategy on Energy, through:**

- **The systematic mentioning**, in the amended version of the Green Paper, as in all future EC documents on Energy, of **regional actors and their representative organisations** as official partners in the European Energy policy

In this respect, the AER member regions draw the attention of the Commission towards their **detailed remarks to the Green Paper**, attached to this position paper, and ask that these propositions will be taken into account in the White Paper.

- The systematic invitation of the regions and their representative organisations **to participate in all the formal- and informal reflection groups** established by the European Commission in the field of Energy

In this respect, the member regions of the AER hope that the request of the AER's application to become a member of the Managenergy reflection group will be accepted.

- Particular attention and a sufficient amount of financial support should be given to regional and interregional energy projects, in light of the future cohesion policy<sup>8</sup>, but also in the frame of the aforementioned FP7 and the CIP

In this context, the AER member regions:

- Insist on **the importance of interregional initiatives**, like the AER action plan on Energy 2006-2012, that provides them with concrete proposals i.e. Partnership pool, on-line database for regional best practices in the field of energy<sup>9</sup> which are useful tools that favour the establishment of a European Energy strategy.
- Express consequently their wish that these initiatives will receive **active support from the European Union**.

**In conclusion, the AER member regions declare that they will closely follow the developments around the debate on European Energy legislation and ask their representative and vice-President, Onno Hoes, Regional Minister of Noord-Brabant (NL), to contact the respective authorities within the European Commission, first and foremost, Commissioner Piebalgs, to promote their current position on this matter.**

*1<sup>st</sup> September 2006*

<sup>8</sup> Green Paper on a European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy

<sup>9</sup> AER [page on sustainable energy](http://www.a-e-r.org/main-issues/environment-sustainable-energy.html) : <http://www.a-e-r.org/main-issues/environment-sustainable-energy.html>

**Commentaries detailed by the Assembly of European Regions  
to the Green Paper on Energy (COM(2006)105final)**

*Annex to the AER response to the Green Paper on Energy*

The member regions of the “Regional Policies” Commission of the AER, in light of their response to the Green Paper on Energy, have the following remarks and propositions to add:

**1. As for the role of regional authorities**

For the moment, the Green Paper only mentioned regional authorities in the context of EU cohesion policy, thus encouraging the regions to use this policy to support projects aiming at developing renewable and alternative energy sources and improving energy efficiency.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Commission insists on the strong need for high-level support and on the key role that Member States play to improve energy efficiency in Europe and to implement its action plan in this field. For the AER members, this vision is too restricted.

For this reason,

- With regard to the key role that has been played and will be played by the regions in the field of energy efficiency,
- With regard to the experience that they have gathered and will gather in the future, not only through interregional projects supported by cohesion policy, but also in the frame of European Research programmes like FP6 / FP7 or the Intelligent Energy Europe programme (IEE)/ future CIP,
- And according to the partnership and subsidiarity principles:

**The AER members call for a more systematic recognition of the regions as partners in the European Energy strategy**, not only in the context of better energy efficiency in the future, but also when it comes to support energy diversification, sustainable development and the stimulation of innovation.

**To be concrete, the AER members propose the following amendments to be made to the Green Paper:**

P.4. Paragraph 3, new sentence at the end of paragraph: “An implication at all levels, not only at the level of Member States, but also on a regional, local and citizen level, is necessary.”

P.9. Section 2.3., paragraph 4, new sentence at beginning of paragraph: “When setting up this methodology, particular attention should be paid to those best practices that have already been developed by certain lead regions that are experts on the topic”.

P.10. Section 2.4., paragraph 1, new sentence at the end of the paragraph: “This involves not only a strong investment from the Member States, but also from regional and sub-regional authorities.”

P.11. Paragraph 2, add to the second sentence: “This effort needs a constant support and determination at all levels; sub-regional, regional and at the highest political level throughout Europe.”

P.12. Paragraph 1, add to the second sentence: “A certain number of countries experience a rapid growth in their use of renewable energy sources because of supportive national political frameworks and the active role of their regions.”

P.13. Last paragraph, add to the last sentence: “...Actors and high level decision makers, but also regional and sub-regional level,...”

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<sup>10</sup> Green Paper on a European strategy for sustainable, competitive and secure energy, p.10-11

## **2. As for the role of interregional organisations**

The regions have shown their willingness to promote certain Renewable Energy Sources, like for example wind energy, solar energy, or biomass. **The European Union must better promote regional best practices in order to recognise the key role that interregional organisations, like the AER, can play in the implementation and dissemination of these projects.**

To be concrete, the AER member regions propose **the following amendment** to be made to the Green Paper:

P.19. Point 3, First sentence: “The European community needs a real EU wide debate, which actively includes the regions and their representative organisations, about the different energy sources...”

## **3. As for the solutions suggested by the European Commission on the diversification of the energy mix and sustainable development**

Apart from the solutions proposed by the European Commission, and in particular the fact that the European Union must (1) promote the use of local energy sources, (2) to be a leader in the field of energy efficiency, and (3) contribute systematically to cost-benefit analysis, **supporting the active promotion of regional energy best practices, above all in the field of renewable energy sources and energy efficiency, is a key element to the success of a European Energy strategy.** The AER member regions regret that this solution does not appear among the options given in the questionnaire and insist again on a larger acknowledgement of the key role that regions and their representative organisations can play in the energy debate, also with regards to the aforementioned proposed amendments.

**In conclusion, the AER member regions call on the European Commission to duly consider their amendments and remarks as part of the propositions for the White Paper that will be created on the basis of this consultation. The AER also expects that these remarks will be taken into account in the decisions by the Member States and will be followed by concrete actions of support by the European Commission.**

*Strasbourg, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2006*