



Conseil des Communes et Régions d'Europe
Council of European Municipalities and Regions

HOUSING AND THE ENERGY OF THE FUTURE: THE STRUCTURAL FUNDS IN ACTION

Conference organised by CECODHAS and CEMR in partnership with the CoR
22 June 2009
Brussels

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Opening session:

Climate change, energy and the economic crisis:

how to help EU regions to face those challenges?

Ladies and gentleman!

One of the primary challenges today is a radical reduction in our climate impact – both at the global and local level.

Municipalities, county councils and regions play an important part in the energy and climate process, and also take major initiatives. There is also a clear political determination to extend such initiatives and to contribute to effective co-operation in this area.

The current global financial and economic crisis has hit almost all parts of Europe with great force, and with major consequences for local and regional governments. CEMR firmly believes it is essential that the current crisis does not undermine the fight against climate change, to further strive for sustainable development and to pave the way towards a low-carbon economy.

CEMR welcomes the priority given to energy efficiency and energy savings in buildings in the European Recovery plan, and the recognition of the potential for CO₂ emissions reduction, green investments and sustainable growth in the building sector.

We regret, however, that the European Recovery plan does not provide financial support to energy efficiency projects at local and regional level. The local and regional level have a leading role to play in the implementation of economic stimulus and recovery programmes, and their investments are more likely to be successful and more speedily than those made at other levels.

There is an important potential of innovative and sustainable projects, which could have rapid and long-term impacts on restructuring the EU's economy, as underlined in the CEMR resolution adopted on the occasion of the CEMR 24th General Assembly in Malmö on 24 April 2009 (copies will be available in the meeting room).

CEMR members stressed at the recent General Assembly that the climate challenge would not be met without the involvement of municipalities and regions. They reaffirmed their commitment to help to meet the EU's energy targets (to reduce CO₂ emissions, to improve energy efficiency and to increase the share of renewables by 20% by 2020).

Local and regional governments have already implemented a multitude of actions to fight against climate change and adapt to its impact. This message has been reiterated three weeks ago (2 to 4 June), at the Local Government Climate Leadership Summit in Copenhagen. Around 700 representatives of local and regional authorities from 60 countries expressed their will to tackle the climate challenge and to develop an energy-efficient and low carbon society.

In order to achieve this objective, local and regional governments, however, need the necessary political recognition as well as adequate financial and technical support. In this respect, CEMR cooperates with its European and global partners, to achieve an explicit reference to the role of local and regional government in the post-Kyoto agreement to be achieved in Copenhagen in December 2009.

Local and regional authorities have a political responsibility towards their citizens to offer a sustainable quality of life. They become more aware of climate change and the contribution of energy use. They realise the potential to save energy and to reduce public spending and thus more and more implement sustainable energy measures.

Furthermore, municipalities and regions dispose of the necessary competences as planners, substantial users, purchasers and sometimes producers of energy, permit delivering authorities and owners of an important stock of real property and social housing. Their proximity to citizens allows them to provide information and incentives to encourage tenants and owners to improve the energy performance of their building.

In short – on the local level you have something you can never get in the same way on the national level – The involvement of the citizens. And as the Mayor of Sala I meet this every day. The teachers and the school children striving towards a sustainable school, the group of citizens who have decided to build a plant to produce solar energy or all the small entrepreneurs who are very busy in the area of renewable energy and environment. And all the house-owners who are trying to find new ways of saving energy in their buildings.

Well, you can make a very long list with examples of the involvement of the citizens. And this is one of the reasons why I am convinced that the local and regional level have a leading role to play in the process towards a sustainable world.

Thank you!