

Energy for the European Green Deal

Stakeholder Dialogue held in Valletta on 25 May 2022

The European Commission Representation in Malta, together with DG Energy, held a stakeholder dialogue on “REPowering Malta: Ensuring energy affordability, security of supply and sustainability” on 25 May 2022, in Valletta.

The aim of the dialogue was for EC policy makers and relevant stakeholders from the public and private energy sector to discuss REPowering Malta to ensure energy affordability, security of supply and sustainability.

Acting Head of Representation, Therese Zahra, introduced the dialogue. Gonzalo Fernandez Costa, expert in Energy Security and Safety at the European Commission spoke about security of energy supply in Malta. Ms Catharina Sikow-Magny, Director for Green Transition and Energy System Integration, presented the implementation of the EU Green Deal and the RePowerEU plan in Malta, and led the discussion and replied to questions from the audience.

Q1: Which is the biggest challenge related to the implementation of the Repower EU plan in Malta?

COM - The challenge for all Member States is to have a good, realistic and yet ambitious plan not only to 2020 but also to 2050. It must be realistic, implementable, and include sources of financing.

Audience: Sceptic about the push for solar energy because i) Malta has 365 days of dirt and dust ii) we've removed ugly antennas on roofs and we're replacing with something else iii) we used to use roofs and will not be able to do so anymore. We should focus more on offshore floating wind energy.

Another member of the audience mentioned the spill over of solar panels on agriculture, because space is limited. The use of photovoltaics on greenhouses has potential effects on reducing agricultural output. We need food security apart from energy security.

Population density means that solar panels on top of high flats are unable to cater for the increasing population. In addition, tall flats create shade for houses around.

LNG comes from authoritarian regimes, implying similar risks to those related to Russia.

COM – the purpose of such discussions are to ensure that local specificities are taken into account. Each Member State has to look at how it can reach the targets. Wind and floating solar are possible and should be considered. Re land use, we cannot jeopardise our food security which is becoming more risky. Public reluctance is important and this is where we need to engage more to discuss on how change can be brought in. Fossil fuels typically come from authoritarian regimes and that's why in the long term we need to phase them out.

Q2: Road infrastructure in Gozo is increasing, and there is talk of a tunnel between Malta and Gozo and talk of an airport. How does this fit in with Gozo being put forward as a carbon-neutral island?

COM – what is important is that all elements are considered in the plan to decarbonise the island. We must ask what is necessary, and how can it be decarbonised.

Q3: Proposal to make green public procurement mandatory for all public construction projects. A problem in Malta is related to planning for solar power. A solution could be having solar power

generated on public buildings serving many households and creating energy communities. A major issue to be addressed is building regulation because Malta has very lax energy codes. If we manage to solve the sustainability aspects that affect the building sector, it will be easier to make a difference.

COM – Having energy communities is a very good way forward. We would like it to happen more in all Member States.

Q4: Is there an indication on the revision of targets? Should we expect a longer legislative process?

COM – The French Presidency is progressing very well. We are currently looking at the challenges and the Presidency will go for the common position of Member States not taking into account the Commission's changes. Many of the changes will be proposed by Parliament, such as on renewables. We do not want delays, so we will work together with both institutions to bring about convergence.

Comments from the audience: There is no adequate transportation system such as a tram and we depend heavily on cars. In the NECP Malta said that it will not allow energy communities because of supply monopoly.

COM – Malta is not alone in not having transposed the renewables directive and we are following up on that. It is important that energy communities are legally possible.

Q5: How can the Commission address the challenges?

COM – Every Member State must make its voice heard. Make your voices heard through the Ministries, but also directly with the Commission directly. There are legal tools, EU islands initiative, cross-border renewables projects where a project with Italy could be one to start planning, and now, the discussion on REPOWER EU. Commission is at the citizens' disposal.

From the audience: a lot is happening in Gozo with regards sustainability including a Horizon 2020 project. We want Gozo to be carbon-neutral before Malta. It's important that the spill-over effects remain on the island. As regards accessibility, there is a consultation on the air link and the infrastructure is there and the project is very sustainable (electric airplanes). A permanent link (tunnel) should ease the flow of traffic coming by ferry already.

Q6: Has the European Commission looked into other environmental impacts of an offshore windfarm?

COM – The marine environment is very valuable and can be very vulnerable and when one is assessing sea projects one must evaluate the environmental impacts and how to mitigate them. When we plan offshore wind, it is important to work together with the neighbouring member states to optimise resources. There are certainly environmental impacts and these need to be studied, mitigated and avoided as much as possible.

Moderator: There's a research project by the University of Malta on solar panels in the sea. Perhaps more funding for these types of projects could make them more feasible.

Q7: Is there acknowledgement of barriers caused by state aid rules to the green transition?

COM – The state aid rules were adjusted very recently, and there is new guidance where green investments typically get very rapid treatment. In the context of the crisis, DG COMP has provided reassurance to Member States that their projects will be treated more rapidly and more favourably. State aid rules are there to ensure a level playing field in the EU, and there is enough flexibility and possibilities for green investments already.

Q8: What are your views on promoting building-integrated PVs?

COM – We should always combine. Energy efficiency first – that is about insulation and saving first. We should have integrated planning.

Q9/comment: highlighted the importance of research and innovation. MCST is looking forward to working with stakeholders to use national budgets and to engage end users.

Q10/comment: The European Commission has no magic wand. We need to help ourselves first.

Q11: Are there serious considerations for interconnections with North Africa?

The Commission is looking into interconnections with North Africa as well as Ukraine and Western Balkans as part of neighbourhood policy. Also, Trans European Networks Regulation allows projects of mutual interest which connect the EU with neighbouring countries. We already have one project – Italy – Tunisia and there are others in discussion. Greece is looking into Egypt. We're discussing trade possibility with Ukraine, and Norway is already in the plans. Cooperation could be Malta-Italy but also Malta and a Third Country.

Q12: How can the European Commission enable the acceleration of deployment of renewables in Malta?

COM - Firstly, an increased ambition in Malta. Then through the different plans and tools (recovery, Power EU) and through concrete projects. There are new tools such as cross border with other countries, EU islands initiative and the new proposal on making permits faster.

Q13: How can awareness on sustainability be increased?

COM – Young people are perhaps educating their parents. This is thanks to the education system and the discussions that are ongoing. We need to ensure that more of the science is brought to the education system.