

Press Release: Crucial renovation support schemes must survive political cycles

Šamorín, 26th of May 2023

Renovation programmes that are vital for Europe's efforts to achieve its ambitious climate goals must be bolstered by renewed political will and be maintained across election cycles, according to delegates attending the 4th edition of the Central and Eastern European Energy Efficiency Forum (C4E).

The multi-day C4E event focused on three main issues: energy security, the reconstruction of Ukraine and the EU's Green Deal-enabling 'Fit for 55' package of energy and climate reforms.

Representatives from the private sector and civil society urged political actors to take brave decisions and ensure that renovation programmes are given the necessary time to actually work by maintaining them across election periods. If that political will is found, the CEE region has the chance to be the most successful region in the EU for energy renovations.

A busy electoral cycle awaits Europe over the next 12 months. In the CEE region alone, Croatia, Greece, Poland and Slovakia will hold national elections, with polls also scheduled in Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain. EU-wide elections in June 2024 will usher in new political leadership at both the European Parliament and European Commission.

At the C4E event, public authorities were also encouraged to roll out well-designed subsidy schemes that have a long-term outlook and address the needs of those that really need support, as well as leading by example by dramatically increasing the renovation rate of public buildings.

Governments should also immediately refocus ongoing energy price subsidies — which have topped €500 billion since the start of the price crisis in 2021 — towards efficiency measures that will have a long-term impact and insulate households and businesses against future shocks.

Slovakian President Zuzana Čaputová opened the C4E Forum, held in Slovakia for the very first time, with a video message, in which she insisted that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased the sense of urgency for energy transition policies.

"In Slovakia, in the next few years, we will spend a huge amount of resources on rebuilding our economy and making it more resilient. The energy efficiency of our buildings is among our top priorities."

"Supporting the Renovation Wave, which is compatible with the European Green Deal and Paris Climate Agreement, will help reduce energy bills. This could be a real gamechanger."

The president is matching words with actions as her office aims to become net-zero by 2030, the first public body to do so in Slovakia and possibly the first presidential office in the world.

"This means clean mobility, zero waste, energy efficiency, renewables or planting thousands of trees to offset air travel."

'Political will' and 'financing' were identified by the forum's attendees as the two main challenges facing energy efficiency policies in the CEE region; however, several speakers pointed out that the latter is often guaranteed when the former is in place.

Slovak member of the European Parliament Martin Hojsík said during a panel dedicated to political leadership during times of crisis that financing is not the main concern in the EU.

“There is an insane amount of money available, even more so if unused loans are taken up, under terms that are impossible to find on any other market. CEE political leaders need to be reminded that the energy transition will ultimately benefit them with more voter support.”

Ukraine’s reconstruction needs were also discussed prominently during the forum, as the EU-candidate country aims to ‘build back better and greener’ following Russia’s illegal invasion. Adoption of EU norms and standards is ongoing and is set to be accelerated.

Quick fixes and short-term policies should be avoided, according to industry and civil society speakers, who are championing measures such as new financial mechanisms that include grants and preferential loans.

Capacity building for Ukrainian companies and support through new energy efficiency standards should also be provided and although the war is not yet over, decisions must be made now.

According to **Anna Ackermann, policy analyst for the International Institute for Sustainable Development’s Energy team working on green reconstruction of Ukraine and board member of the Center for Environmental Initiatives Ecoaction**, Ukraine is already rebuilding in line with the EU’s goal of climate neutrality by 2050 but it is also important to keep a Ukrainian ownership of the reconstruction.

“They (EU countries) of course see the economic business interests reconstruction because the companies could be coming with their know how, equipment and so on to Ukraine to physically reconstruct [...] How we can actually have not just the importing of knowledge, resources, and know-how but to actually have that installed in Ukraine, have production lines installed in Ukraine, which would be very important for Ukraine’s sustainable economic recovery and development.”

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