

Summary

Meeting with WindEurope, 14/05/2020

Participants: Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius, a member of his Cabinet and representatives of representatives of WindEurope and CEOs of wind energy companies.

The Commissioner recognised the key role of wind energy in the clean energy transition and the climate-neutrality objective by 2050. He stated that for the European Commission the COVID-19 recovery should be strongly based on investments in line with the Green Deal priorities. Deployment of renewable offshore energies in the EU should play a prominent role in this perspective, in view of their high potential for generating domestic and sustainable jobs, value chains and related industrial, research and services capacity.

The Commissioner highlighted that while the expansion of renewable energy production is part of a sustainable future, appropriate attention had to be paid to its environmental impacts at local and regional scale. Onshore and offshore wind farm developments have to comply with EU legislation on environmental impact assessments and, when the project is situated in or close to a Natura 2000 site, of the Habitats Directive, with a view to identifying, avoiding and mitigating negative effects on the environment.

He underlined that compliance with the EU environmental legislation is not an obstacle, but an opportunity to facilitate the authorisation of projects and make them more sustainable. The Commission is continuously issuing guidance to assist Member States and operators in better implementation and use of the environmental impact assessment instruments.

There is also a clear need for strategic analysis and planning of interactions of wind energy with the land and marine environment and space management, and the forthcoming offshore renewable energy strategy will provide a vision and a series of policy initiatives for fostering the development of offshore renewable energies in the whole EU up to 2050, in a cost-effective and sustainable way.

Finally, the Commissioner underlined the critical role of the circular economy for further renewables deployment (e.g. batteries, solar panels or wind blades materials recovery and recycling).

The participants on the industry side also highlighted the key role of wind energy, onshore and offshore, for decarbonisation, economic recovery and job creation. They detailed that to reach decarbonisation objectives, there is need to double the number of installations per year. By 2050 wind energy should increase massively, by factor of 4 for onshore and 20 for offshore wind energy).

A major issue is the length of permitting, mainly due to bureaucracy in Member States, regions and locally. Permits are also an issue to renew wind farms that are reaching their end of life. Current technologies are between 30% and 100% more efficient than those of 20-30 years ago, meaning more power for a similar spatial footprint. Offshore wind extension can be done without damaging environment and coexisting with fishing activities, however there is need for early engagement with local fishing communities.

The industry representatives expressed their expectations vis-à-vis maritime spatial planning, focusing on co-use of maritime space, and recognised the recyclability of blades issues and is committed towards zero waste, for which the role of R&I is key, especially within Horizon Europe.