

Impact Outlook

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Working together to deploy new energy technologies

In a continuation of their interview European Technology and Innovation Platform Smart Networks for Energy Transition (ETIP SNET) Chairman Konstantin Staschus and Vice-Chairmen Nikos Hatzigiorgiouris and Thierry Le Boucher highlight how valuable collaboration and engagement is to securing a sustainable energy future in Europe

Firstly, can you talk about the ways the five ETIP SNET Working Groups contribute towards research and innovation in each of the areas they are responsible for?

TLB: What we try to analyse inside the ETIP SNET are the research priorities. The strength of ETIP SNET is having all the sectors represented in one ETIP so that you avoid silo thinking and you can develop really integrated solutions. Sometimes from one energy to another, for instance, you have a lot of electricity at a time because it is a sunny day in Europe, everyone is outside and few people are using electricity in the homes. In this situation you have the opportunity to transform this electricity into hot water and you will use this hot water another time. This is the means to decarbonise many sectors, and of course mobility is an important factor regarding CO₂ emissions but also regarding emission of particles, especially in big cities. So we are working together with all sectors represented inside the ETIP. It is really by working together that we can find new ideas that will work in day to day life.

Energy transition is quite complicated, but at the end of the day the customer wants something simple and is ready to make efforts to reduce CO₂ emissions related to individual energy consumption, provided the cost is acceptable and provided it remains simple. Using the example of the washing machine, a customer will say: ‘I accept that you will decide when I start to push the button, you will decide in the five following hours when you want to start my washing machine, I don’t really care, but I want the work to be done and at the same time I also want some control from time to time because I may have friends coming over and I don’t want my washing machine to make too much noise, etc.’ So we need to give the opportunity for customers to decide. We have to keep things simple, that means working together across many sectors, because, for example, you cannot have several different devices inside your home to pilot different energy needs.

How important are the ETIP SNET Regional Workshops to facilitating knowledge transfer within this sector?

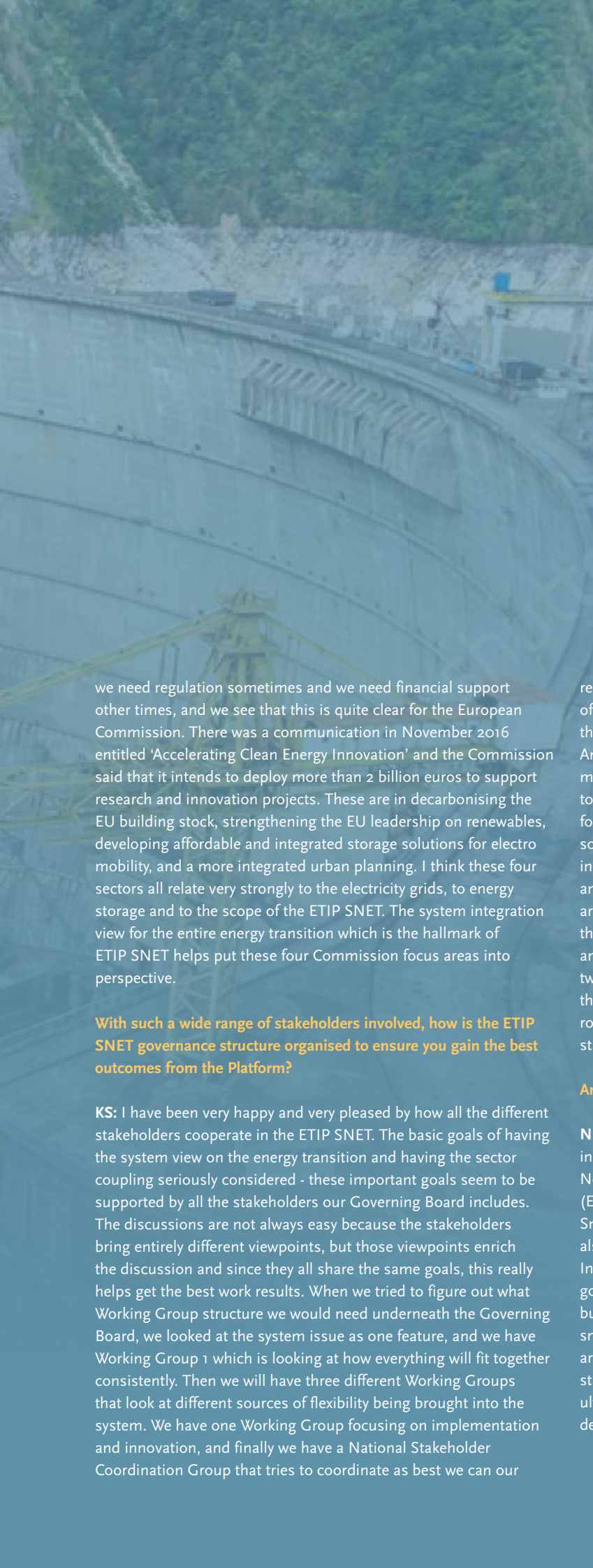
NH: I think the ETIP SNET Regional Workshops are very valuable as they provide knowledge sharing and lessons learned for some very considerable efforts that are underway at a national level and help both sides to align research, development and innovation to the national needs and to the regional needs. It also helps regional authorities to capitalise on what is happening already on very important findings at a European level. It is one of the most important activities of ETIP SNET I believe.

What are some of the ways you collaborate or partner with some of the other key EU programmes or platforms, and why this is important?

NH: We already collaborate with the main renewable platforms like ETIP PV, ETIP Wind and also the ETIP for Buildings and Renewable Heating and Cooling, customer organisations, etc. This collaboration is important in the sense that, to operate efficiently, the current development of energy systems also needs some flexibility, it needs resources provided by thermal and renewable generation, as well as active customers, etc. So it is important that we collaborate and partner with other platforms. It is also worth mentioning the activities of the Association of European Renewable Energy Research (EUREC) which is trying to coordinate collaboration between all ETIPs, and I think it is a good decision that we are taking an active part in this.

How important is it for ETIP SNET to be engaging with policy makers about accelerating the deployment of technology in Europe?

TLB: I believe that we need innovation support to develop new technologies, such as energy storage. I would say that what we need for various technologies to be deployed is a level playing field. New technologies should not be at a disadvantage against existing technologies, for instance through regulation. Sometimes there are barriers that should be removed in order to enable the development of new technologies and specific support is needed for the first deployment in order to make it more attractive for investors. So



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we need regulation sometimes and we need financial support other times, and we see that this is quite clear for the European Commission. There was a communication in November 2016 entitled 'Accelerating Clean Energy Innovation' and the Commission said that it intends to deploy more than 2 billion euros to support research and innovation projects. These are in decarbonising the EU building stock, strengthening the EU leadership on renewables, developing affordable and integrated storage solutions for electro mobility, and a more integrated urban planning. I think these four sectors all relate very strongly to the electricity grids, to energy storage and to the scope of the ETIP SNET. The system integration view for the entire energy transition which is the hallmark of ETIP SNET helps put these four Commission focus areas into perspective.

With such a wide range of stakeholders involved, how is the ETIP SNET governance structure organised to ensure you gain the best outcomes from the Platform?

KS: I have been very happy and very pleased by how all the different stakeholders cooperate in the ETIP SNET. The basic goals of having the system view on the energy transition and having the sector coupling seriously considered - these important goals seem to be supported by all the stakeholders our Governing Board includes. The discussions are not always easy because the stakeholders bring entirely different viewpoints, but those viewpoints enrich the discussion and since they all share the same goals, this really helps get the best work results. When we tried to figure out what Working Group structure we would need underneath the Governing Board, we looked at the system issue as one feature, and we have Working Group 1 which is looking at how everything will fit together consistently. Then we will have three different Working Groups that look at different sources of flexibility being brought into the system. We have one Working Group focusing on implementation and innovation, and finally we have a National Stakeholder Coordination Group that tries to coordinate as best we can our

research prioritisation at the European level with each national level of governments, regulators and national research platforms. So far, this approach has worked quite well.

An aspect that is important to ETIP SNET, given that we have so many stakeholders, is that we are as transparent as we can be towards the rest of the world. We know from our Working Group formation that there was enormous interest from many parts of society, including academics and research institutes, to participate in our work. We are trying to do that justice by being transparent and having a user-friendly webpage that is constantly updated. We are also transparent internally by having an executive committee that includes representatives from each of the six working groups and in addition to my role as chair of the Governing Board and the two vice chairs - Thierry Le Boucher and Nikos Hatzigiorgiou. So the transparency is important and we agreed early on that we would rotate leadership positions quite rapidly between different kinds of stakeholders, as long as they have the system view.

Are there any important events coming up in this sector?

NH: InnoGrid2020+ at the end of June was a big event on innovation in electricity networks, organised by The European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E) and the European Distribution System Operators for Smart Grids (EDSO). EURELECTRIC's annual conventions are also very interesting for people with an interest in the Electricity Industry. Their next event will be in Ljubljana in June 2018. Another good event is the European Utility Week in Amsterdam where business and innovation leaders can network with others in the smart utility community. As for ETIP SNET, the regional workshops are a good opportunity for stimulating knowledge-sharing between stakeholders and among Member States and associated countries, ultimately to foster the efficient implementation of research, development and innovation projects all over Europe.