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European Sustainable Energy Future

Insight note from the EUSEW2026

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At a glance

The European Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW) is the European Commission's flagship event dedicated to clean energy and renewable technologies. This year it was the 20th edition of the event, held under the theme of 'A clean, secure and competitive Energy Union'.

Attending the conference provided an opportunity to hear first-hand perspectives from policymakers, industry leaders, and subject-matter experts, while engaging with stakeholders from across the European energy sector.

One message emerged consistently throughout the event: Europe's energy transition is no longer solely an environmental agenda – it is increasingly shaped by the interconnected objectives of decarbonisation, geopolitical security, and economic competitiveness. Success will depend as much on clear policy as on reliable partnerships that ensure access to the critical raw resources.

My key observation is that the energy transition requires a compelling vision of the future society the energy system is intended to support. Ultimately, energy's future is intrinsically linked to the future of the society.

"A systems perspective may prove just as important as technological innovation in shaping Europe's long-term energy future."

Key themes

A clean, secure and competitive energy future

A strong and consistent message throughout EUSEW2026 was the need to deliver an energy system that is simultaneously clean, secure, and competitive. Discussions reflected the increasingly interconnected nature of climate objectives, geopolitical security, and economic competitiveness.

Decarbonisation remains a central driver of the transition, but it is now accompanied by a growing focus on reducing strategic dependencies, strengthening resilience, and ensuring affordable energy for citizens and industry. The energy transition is therefore no longer viewed solely as an environmental objective; it has become a strategic economic and geopolitical priority for the EU.

Policy and regulatory frameworks as enablers

A clear message emerged from discussions: the importance of policy and regulation in enabling, rather than constraining, the energy transition.

Speakers highlighted the need for stable and predictable frameworks that provide clear direction, remove barriers to investment, accelerate delivery of energy infrastructure, and support integration of energy systems across the Member States.

Alongside policy ambition, there was a clear emphasis on implementation, recognising current differences in application of the EU regulation in local context can significantly vary between the Member States, making a pan-EU energy system difficult to create and operate.

Partnerships and collaboration

Partnership emerged as a critical enabler of the energy transition, both within the EU and with international partners.

Externally, discussions highlighted the importance of securing access to critical raw materials required for the deployment of clean-energy infrastructure. The discussions emphasised a need for partnerships based on shared values and a fair and just compensation.

Internally, the focus was on strengthening cooperation between Member States to support integrated energy markets, interconnected infrastructure, and coordinated system planning and operation.

A consistent message across multiple sessions was that the transition cannot be delivered by individual organisations or countries acting alone; it requires a true collaboration across the borders in the EU.

Observations

The future energy system requires a clearer vision

While discussions focused extensively on technologies, infrastructure, and policy measures, I found less attention devoted to defining the characteristics of the future society these efforts are intended to support.

Questions such as how people will live, work, and enjoy leisure – and therefore consume energy in the coming decades received comparatively less focus than discussions on generation and supply-side solutions. Yet I find that a clear understanding of future demand is essential for determining the scale and nature of energy generation, distribution, infrastructure, and resource requirements.

From a systems perspective, defining the desired end state is as important as selecting the technologies used to achieve it.

Pan-European integration is a strategic opportunity

A recurring message throughout the conference was the importance of greater cooperation and integration across Member States. This extends beyond energy generation and grid interconnection to the broader lifecycle of the energy system.

The transition presents an opportunity to improve alignment across planning, infrastructure development, resource management, and end-of-life considerations. Achieving this will require not only investment in physical infrastructure but also coherent policy and regulatory frameworks capable of supporting long-term coordination across the EU.

The scale of the transition suggests that integration should be considered as much a governance, and a mindset change, challenge as a technical one.

A system thinking approach is needed

The conference rightly emphasised collaboration on energy infrastructure, markets, and technology deployment. However, I observed less discussion around the wider interactions between energy infrastructure and other critical societal systems.

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Energy does not operate in isolation. Its development influences—and is influenced by—industrial policy, economic competitiveness, education, workforce skills, healthcare, social welfare, and broader societal priorities.

As the transition progresses, there may be increasing value in considering energy not as a standalone sector but as part of a larger interconnected system. Such a perspective could help strengthen decision-making and ensure that energy policies are evaluated within the context of their wider societal system with many moving and living parts.

Key takeaways

The energy transition is an opportunity for a strategic pan-EU transformation

The EU's energy agenda is increasingly shaped by the combined objectives of decarbonisation, energy security, industrial competitiveness, and strategic resilience – building a sustainable future. The energy transition is an opportunity for a strategic pan-EU transformation to create an environmental responsible, economically viable, socially beneficial, and resilient Europe.

Integration is the enabler

The challenge lies in integration: aligning policy, regulation, infrastructure, markets, and mindset into a coherent system. Success will depend less on individual technical solutions and more on the ability to coordinate complex interdependencies across the Member States.

Energy system requires a systems perspective

Energy cannot be considered in isolation from the wider system it supports and ultimately is a part of. Long-term decisions about infrastructure, generation, and energy use should be integrated with other parts of the society. A systems view may prove as essential as technological innovation in shaping a sustainable (energy) future for Europe.

Impressum

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