

7 December 2009

Political declaration on the North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative

The declaration:

1. The Ministers of the North Seas Countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom

Considering,

2. The crucial role which offshore wind energy is bound to play in order for Europe to meet the EU's 20-20-20 targets. The major part of offshore wind energy development in Europe will be focused on the North and North West Seas. The development of electricity (inter)connector infrastructure in these regions has several objectives, providing benefits for security of supply, competition and the European energy market, as well as for the integration of renewable energy.

3. The vital importance of effective coordination and oversight in the delivery of the (inter)connection of offshore wind energy and for essential onshore grid reinforcement in a timely, efficient and secure way.

4. The European Economic Recovery Plan and more specifically the provision for North Seas Grid projects in Regulation (EC) 663/2009.

Welcoming,

5. The existing initiatives and research in the North Seas countries, such as EWIS, Tradewind Windspeed, Offshore Grid and the ISLES project, the existing multilateral initiatives, in particular the Kriegers Flak project in the Baltic Sea, and the multilateral coordination on several levels, such as:

- ENTSO-E (European Network for Transmission System Operators) & national TSOs and the regional cooperation within ENTSO-E under the "third package" and their related grid development and investment plan as important new tools for coordination. In ENTSO-E a working group on renewable will be created. One of its activities will be on offshore developments (operational, market, regulatory issues). The planning issues will be dealt with in the North Sea regional group under the System Development committee, which will also work for solutions to the remaining TSO-related questions concerning offshore grid development in the North Seas.

- ERI (Electricity Regional Initiative) Central West Region and France, United Kingdom, Ireland Regions which will play an important role in coordinating regulatory matters.

- Adamowitsch Working Group, established by Mr. Adamowitsch, TEN-E (Trans-European Networks for Electricity) European coordinator for connections of offshore wind power in Northern Europe (North Seas and the Baltic Sea).

- The Commission's conclusion that there is a need for a blueprint with a common vision for a North Sea and North West offshore grid, to be developed by Member States and regional actors involved.

6. The Pentalateral initiative, which aims at improving the process of regional integration of electricity markets and achieving further steps in the field of security of electricity supply.

7. The decision of the Ministers of the Pentalateral Energy Forum on the 8th of December 2008 to start a discussion about offshore wind grid issues in the North Seas.

8. The decision of the Ministers of the Pentalateral Energy Forum on the 12th of June 2009 to further develop a working plan.

Recognizing that,

9. The costs, associated with the development of electricity (inter)connector infrastructure are enormous and various barriers still exist (technical, market, regulatory, and policy). These are shared challenges for all the countries concerned.

10. The ongoing initiatives to improve multilateral coordination clearly require an enhanced political commitment from the Member States. Cooperation on a multilateral level is essential for the effective development of offshore wind and infrastructure developments in the North Seas.

11. A concrete vision and plan for offshore wind energy in the North Seas region is needed, through a joint initiative between the Member States.

Highlighting that,

12. The North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative will build on existing collaborative initiatives in the Pentalateral member countries, will use the results of research (such as EWIS, Tradewind, Windspeed, Offshore Grid and ISLES) and will be informed by other multilateral initiatives, in particular the Kriegers Flak project in the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, the result of this work will provide joint input from the North Seas countries to the planned European Commission's Communication on a Blueprint for a North Sea offshore grid.

13. The North Seas Countries Offshore Grid Initiative will complement the work on offshore energy underway by:

- ENTSO-E & national TSOs: technical feasibility & implementation, and market aspects,

- ERI: regulatory coordination and advice,

- TEN-E European coordinator Mr. Adamowitsch and his working group: Industry, follow-up of technology & R&D, specific project work and initiatives outside of the North Seas Countries' Offshore Grid Initiative.

14. There is a shared commitment to involve other relevant stakeholders.

15. A common long term vision on offshore grid development in the North-Seas is vital in order to enable:

Identification of efficient and optimal solutions for the North Seas countries collectively rather than on a national basis. This will encourage strategic planning and cross-border cooperation.

Compatibility of the current and future developments with the long term vision (which will avoid suboptimal investments)

High level input from the important stakeholders in the North Seas region for the European Commission's planned Communication on a blueprint of a North Seas Offshore Grid

Predictability and useful information for the supply chain which will enable the speeding up of development.

Therefore set as an objective

To identify national ambitions for offshore renewable energy sources, shortcomings in present and future cross border grid infrastructure developments and national policies on relevant issues which have impacts on the sustainable development of an offshore North Seas grid (incl. maritime physical planning for offshore wind, site selection, grid configurations),

To facilitate a coordinated electricity infrastructure development, both offshore and the necessary onshore connections, in view of the large amounts of wind power planned,

To achieve a compatible political and regulatory basis for long term offshore infrastructure developments within the North Seas region,

To foster a joint commitment of all relevant stakeholders to tackle all technical, market, regulatory and policy barriers, and,

To organize a workshop with relevant stakeholders, at the beginning of 2010 to prepare a strategic working plan aiming at coordinating the offshore wind and infrastructure developments in the North Seas and listing the potential actions, studies and issues to be tackled by the North Seas Countries' Offshore Grid Initiative.

And express their commitment

16. To convene a High Level meeting of the relevant stakeholders of the Region during the second half of 2010 in order to agree on a strategic working plan by means of a Memorandum of Understanding of the North Seas Offshore Grid Initiative.