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Engl.: Financing as a burden for the implementation of Renewable Energy Communities – Status Quo and need for action for energy policy

Abstract

The EU Horizon 2020 project COME RES focuses on Renewable Energy Communities (RECs). In order to facilitate the development of RECs, the project aims to promote the exchange between different regions and stakeholders in nine different EU countries and Norway through stakeholder dialogues in so-called country desks. In Germany, the project takes Thuringia as a target region and Schleswig-Holstein as a model region, focusing in particular on onshore wind energy and integrated approaches.

With the revised Renewable Energy Directive (RED II), RECs were included in the European policy framework for the first time, mandating Member States to provide support and a regulatory framework for such collective actors. The starting conditions for development vary greatly between the EU countries. Although some countries such as Germany, have long-standing experience in supporting energy communities, especially energy cooperatives (*Energiegenossenschaften*), some shortcomings need to be addressed. In particular, RECs encounter a wide variety of barriers to the implementation of new projects.

The German energy market is highly regulated. The Renewable Energy Sources Act (*Erneuerbare-Energien-Gesetz*) regulates activities concerning the growth of renewable energy projects. As the RED II aims to create an *enabling framework* in the Member States, many administrative barriers need to be removed. The development of new energy cooperatives has to cope with an increasing institutional and regulatory complexity and barriers that hinder the proper development of local RECs. In particular, the uncertainties connected to long-term planning represent an obstacle to the development of new projects.

For the German REC market, the following aspects are key: To reduce financial barriers grid charges and levies need to be reduced and the capability to develop reserves must be enhanced, e.g. for repair works or repowering measures. Support measures are necessary as revenues are often not high enough to hire professional help for business plans or investment decisions. The auction model is still in place, therefore the limits for the exemption for this mechanism need to be increased for RECs, e.g. to 6 MW for PV or 18 MW for wind energy projects pursuant to the new Guidelines on State Aid for Climate, Environmental Protection and Energy endorsed by the European Commission. The German government still needs to transpose many RED II requirements referring to RECs into national law including a definition of the eligible shareholders or spatial proximity in order to clearly distinguish RECs from other energy projects. The so called Easter and Summer packages for the Renewable Energy Sources Act can therefore function as game changers and a step-up the development of RECs in Germany.