

EURELECTRIC NETWORKS COMMITTEE: MAIN FOCUS NOW ON DISTRIBUTION

At its June meeting in Barcelona, the EURELECTRIC Board of Directors confirmed a new focussing of the EURELECTRIC Networks Committee on Distribution issues. The aim is to establish the Committee as the voice of European electricity Distribution System Operators (DSOs) in dialogue with EU bodies and regulators. The groundwork for this re-orientation was laid in the EURELECTRIC Secretariat by creating a Networks Unit last January.

The new strategy of the Networks Committee will be to push topics pro-actively, demonstrating DSOs' contributions to achieving EU policy goals. The Committee is currently preparing a contribution to the EU Citizens' Energy Forum taking place in London on 27-28 October and initiatives to facilitate the working of retail electricity markets. This includes identifying and promoting best practices for informing and protecting consumers, service quality and supplier-switching. The Committee also envisages drawing up guidelines on efficient unbundling, a proactive approach which should help avoid regulatory action.

One area of major importance will be smart metering. The large-scale installation of smart meters - if based on open standards - can further serve to foster a truly competitive retail market and the roll-out of smart meters will equally be an essential building block of future smart grids. New technologies, in particular relating to information and communication, have the potential to change the face of the networks industry and while networks will be able to play a bigger role in achieving environmental goals, the new technologies might well also alter the business model of the industry, changing sources of income and creating new markets.

The emergence of plug-in vehicles (electric and hybrid cars) and similar applications used for distributed generation will accelerate this process and facilitate advanced demand-side management. The aim of the Network Committee is to explain these new opportunities to policy-makers and, following up on EURELECTRIC's groundbreaking Role of Electricity project, to push for an appropriate legislative environment for these activities.

The ability of regulated DSOs to create value is crucial if they are to invest in the necessary assets to address the challenges of the future network – inter alia integrating renewable energies into the electricity system. The Committee will look closely at the European regulatory landscape by performing impact assessments, and will work for fair rules.

In order to carry out the work, the Committee has set up Working Groups on Distribution Regulation & Policy, Distribution Customers & Operations and Smart Grids. Regarding Transmission Networks, a newly formed Network of Experts on Transmission will look at issues related to investment incentives, take part in consultations on the forthcoming European Commission Green Paper on Energy Networks, the review of the Trans-European Networks Guidelines and examine how to streamline authorisation procedures for new infrastructure.