

EnergyNet, Africa Energy Forum

Interviewee: João Galamba, Secretary of State for Energy

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Portugal's energy overview, the renewables plan, and Portugal's relationship with Africa

The Portuguese Government is currently enacting change across its energy landscape in order to achieve a 47 percent renewables influence by 2030. As its capital Lisbon prepares to host this year's Africa Energy Forum, this initiative has taken on extra significance as the two regions continue to find synergies in their targets.

Clear objectives have been adopted to promote energy efficiency among consumers, within industrial processes, and via the expansion of electric mobility, as part of Portugal's drive to set an example in Europe, and indeed to Africa. The country's Secretary of State for Energy, João Galamba, is therefore better placed than most to outline the country's plan to exploit endogenous resources in the name of cleaner energy.

"My mission under the Ministry of the Environment and Energy Transition is to formulate, conduct, execute and evaluate policies on the environment, urban planning, cities, housing, urban transport, suburban and road passenger transport, climate, nature conservation and energy with a view to a sustainable development and social and territorial cohesion," he explains.

Regarding energy specifically, he continues: "Portugal is set to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, with the greatest effort done in the next decade. The National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) therefore reflects the challenges and the main steps to be developed by 2030, aligned with a trajectory of carbon neutrality."

In this framework, new emission reduction targets have been established, whereby final energy consumption will incorporate 47 percent renewables, while 80 percent of electricity generation will likewise derive from renewable sources.

"Furthermore, we now have a target to achieve 35 percent energy efficiency by 2030," Galamba adds. "The future energy system should guarantee the challenge to manage the integration of a massive capacity of intermittent renewable energies, fluctuations in electricity generation and the proper balance between energy supply and demand."

This energy transition also comprises the decommissioning of coal-fired power stations before 2030, compensated by a focus on renewable energy generation; with much of the focus turning towards the vast potential of solar.

"To reinforce solar capacity we'll be conducting power generation auctions," Galamba says. "The first of these is scheduled for July of this year, estimated around 1,350 MW. In January 2020, another auction of 700 MW will take place, in a series of two auctions per year. The aim is to reach between 6 and 7 GW of new capacity in PV power plants to be in operation by 2027."

Building a green and sustainable economy

Ultimately, Portugal's energy transition hopes to be completed to the tune of 100 percent renewables adoption by 2050 – a complete decarbonisation of the power sector.

It's a goal very much in-keeping with Portugal's existing reputation as a leading country in the fight against climate change and the championing of clean energy.

"Achieving carbon neutrality requires a real energy transition," Galamba says. "Our National Energy and Climate Plan translates this aim for the 2030 horizon, aligning the trajectories of carbon neutrality alongside new goals of reduced emissions, incorporating renewables and improving energy efficiency.

"These goals are ambitious, but also realistic, based both on the path Portugal has followed historically, and on its present commitment towards building a green and sustainable economy."

This energy transition is a long-term process that will radically transform the way Portugal produces, stores, distributes, and consumes energy. By reinforcing the incorporation of renewable energies into the national energy system, Galamba explains that it will correspond to a progressive decarbonisation of the country's economy.

The transition won't be cheap of course, with billions of Euros already earmarked for NECP 2030. However, it is necessary given the sweeping infrastructure overhauls required to embrace the power of solar in particular, but also a more diverse renewables landscape moving forward.

"Solar energy will play a decisive role in increasing renewable capacity from 0.5 GW in 2015, to an expected range of 8.1-9.9 GW by 2030," Galamba explains. "Although wind power will continue to play a key role, and is expected to continue to grow (representing approximately 35 percent of the estimated production by 2030), other renewables (biofuels, biomass, biogas, geothermal, oceans) and storage technologies as well as energy vectors (eg hydrogen) are also being addressed."

In cold hard stats, NECP 2030 will be instrumental to the long-term process of transformation that will facilitate carbon neutrality for Portugal's energy system by 2050; and a rise in renewable energy production from 11.8 GW in 2015 to as much as 28.8 GW in 2030.

"Adding to that, there is also the opportunity to promote the circular economy towards a sustainable 100 percent renewable-based energy transition, especially, addressing the sustainable management of other key issues such as strategic minerals, responsible mineral sourcing, water usage and the value for related local communities.

"Overall, the NECP 2030 implementation reinforces the Portuguese path and the commitment to keep improving performance," Galamba surmises.

Strengthening the cooperation between Africa and Europe

The learning curve that Portugal is following at present represents the best of the country's local expertise, but also its global outlook. Understanding global and local challenges simultaneously, partnering accordingly, and contributing to the mitigation of a very international challenge is a familiar ethos for the country; and one that will be put on display at this year's Africa Energy Forum in Lisbon this June.

"Portugal, as a member of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP), has long-promoted a strong cooperation between ourselves and several African countries in different fields, including the energy sector," Galamba says. "The CPLP's strategic vision reiterates the strengthening of multilateral cooperation, based on the interest of its peoples in sustainable and harmonious development, by identifying realistic objectives and actions, valuing the potential and priorities of each country."

The CPLP corresponds to a seventh of the world's hydrocarbon producers, with prospects of improving its position in the coming years to give the community even more strategic importance. As evidence of its successful functionality, in 2017, it was decided among the association to increase the use of renewable energy and to promote energy efficiency in order to achieve diversification of the energy mix, rational use of energy, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Galamba elaborates: "The energy theme has a very important geostrategic dimension where the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries asserts itself, and energy diplomacy is increasingly a relevant tool to which Portugal has contributed. Moreover, the energy cooperation between Portugal and African countries at bilateral level has been amplified, generating excellent synergies through direct prolific relations.

"As such, it is a great honour to host this year's Africa Energy Forum in Lisbon. In as much as energy is a fundamental axis of international relations, there is a real need for an effective diplomatic, institutional and business cooperation between countries. Therefore, the Africa Energy Forum is an excellent opportunity to debate the energy sector, create new partnerships and deepen existing relations."

Galamba emphasises how pivotal Portugal will be not just in setting an example from its domestic setting, but in connecting Europe and Africa under the banner of energy in the future. The country's experience in deploying reliable renewable technologies, promoting effective energy efficiency initiatives and supporting energy innovation makes it a prime candidate for knowledge sharing and indeed event hosting.

"The Africa Energy Forum will strengthen the cooperation between African and European countries, identifying opportunities to work together in the upcoming years," Galamba aptly concludes.