

# RGI ANNUAL REPORT 2015



Renewables   
Grid Initiative



# BUILDING THE FUTURE TOGETHER



Dear readers,

2015 has been an important year for the energy sector. COP 21 in Paris has set a clear trajectory towards decarbonisation not just for a region, but also for the entire planet. Steady cost reductions for renewable energy sources - in particular solar photovoltaic - have driven investments across the world and the majority of new installed capacity has been from renewable energy sources. This trend will continue, **new technologies and new approaches will fundamentally change the power sector in ways we have not seen in the past 100 years.**

After five years of existence, RGI is needed more than ever. The trustful relationships we have successfully built among our members and our broader network are a strong asset to address the challenges the sector is facing and to look for solutions that can be acceptable to citizens, policy makers as well as industrial players. **The energy transition we are experiencing is not just a technological and political challenge, but is first and foremost a societal experiment requiring careful handling.**

This report gives you an overview of our new strategy that gives us the right framework to address the challenges ahead. Moreover, we present some of our highlights of 2015: We **strengthened ties with old friends** by collaborating with ENTSO-E for our 5th European Grid Conference and 2nd Good Practice Award Ceremony; we **explored new territory** and gained new friends during a trip to California that we organised for a high-level delegation from Europe; we finished some of our projects, like BEST-GRID, and **tapped into new fields**, like the digitalisation of the electricity sector.

We see that our continuous efforts to both engage in discussions with European decision-makers and to test practical approaches on the ground slowly lead to improved procedures. In autumn, the European Commission published the second list of Projects of Common Interest. Almost at the same time, our project BESTGRID came to an end, in which practical experiences were gathered that will also help implement other PCIs. Even though we still have a long way to go, procedures are increasingly becoming more open and credible.

2015 has again confirmed that **great things will never be achieved alone**, but need cross-societal collaboration. However, we also learned that leaving beaten paths and old thought patterns behind is indispensable for continuous improvement. That is why we try to challenge both our partners and ourselves every day. Let's continue to work on the future of the electricity sector together!

Sincerely,

Antonella Battaglini,  
CEO Renewables Grid Initiative

# MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS 2015 IN A NUTSHELL



## 1. Advocacy

- Continued exchange with the European Commission and NGOs about how to improve the PCI selection process
- Joint RGI response to Fitness Check on Birds & Habitats Directive to promote a stable legislative environment
- Position papers on how to further increase legitimacy and transparency of PCI process and on COP 21 in Paris, asking for strong commitment to phase out fossil fuel emissions

## 2. Events

- 4th and 5th European Grid Conference in January and November with participation of high-level power sector stakeholders
- Three BESTGRID workshops held in London, Milan and Brussels, showcasing hands-on project findings
- Workshop “A decentralised electricity system – myths and facts” in April in Brussels together with project Community Power
- Event “The Importance of Big Data for the Energiewende” with Jeremy Rifkin and Chairperson of ENTSO-E’s board, Bente Hagem, in collaboration with Stiftung Mercator in April in Berlin
- Expert workshop on “Offshore Grid Infrastructure” in December in Brussels



## 3. International exchange

- “Energy Regions in Transition” trip to California with more than 15 high-level delegates

## 4. Best practice exchange

- “Good Practice of the Year” award ceremony at dinner of the ENTSO-E Annual Conference with high-level audience, including C-level representatives of most of the European TSOs
- Publication of award brochure with foreword by ENTSO-E

## 5. Communication

- Development of new website

## 6. Internal affairs

- RGI members have jointly developed a new mission statement and three strategic objectives
- Spanish TSO Red Eléctrica de España and Spanish NGO Fundación Renovables joined RGI
- We moved into a new office in the centre of Berlin

# OUR STRATEGY

In 2015, RGI went through a comprehensive strategy process. All RGI members were involved via interviews and workshops to jointly review the RGI Mission Statement and develop a set of three Strategic Objectives:

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

Regarding the 'Full Clarity on the Need for Grid Development to Integrate an Increasing Share of Renewables'

**"RGI has developed a comprehensive narrative which resonates with and is supported by its own partners and other external stakeholders and is communicated to all relevant European and national institutions."**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Regarding 'Implementation of Best Practice Approaches'

**"RGI supports initiatives to improve transparency, participation and nature protection during all grid implementation stages, thus leading to better projects and contributing to public support for the grid necessary for an increasingly renewables-based power system."**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

Regarding a 'Supportive Political, Policy and Regulatory Framework'

**"RGI builds public support and advocates for sustainable grid development with relevant EU and national legislative, regulatory and implementing institutions, and for supporting policies and good governance."**

## RGI MISSION STATEMENT

**RGI is a unique collaboration of NGOs and TSOs from across Europe. We promote transparent, environmentally sensitive grid development to enable further steady growth of renewable energy and the energy transition.**

In addition to the Mission Statement and Strategic Objectives, a list of organisational enablers was agreed upon, including amongst others the responsibility of the RGI Secretariat to facilitate a continued dialogue of partners, to help establish new TSO/NGO relationships or secure a continued participation of NGOs by considering this need via co-ordinated fundraising activities.

Strategic Objectives and organisational enablers have been phrased with a 5-year horizon in mind. However, they will be reviewed once a year for their continued fit. The Strategic Objectives provide the framework within which RGI develops its annual Business Plan.

# “GOOD PRACTICE OF THE YEAR” AWARD



The “Good Practice of the Year” is a competition initiated by RGI in 2014. The award has been given out for the second time in November 2015; it aims to disseminate the many good grid development practices out there, give them the recognition they deserve, and to inspire future action and innovative thinking. The competition builds upon a European-wide best practice exchange that RGI started in 2012. Since then, RGI has been collecting cases on how to make grid development more transparent, participative and increasingly environmentally sound, so as to contribute to the social acceptability and the timely implementation of needed projects. All practices collected are available in a database on RGI’s website that provides different filter and search functions.

In 2015, the “Good Practice of the Year” jury honoured the projects “Creating Green Corridors” by

the LIFE Elia-RTE project for their efforts in “Environmental Protection”, the “Pulse heating” by the Energy Supply Organisation of the Cooperative Society in Hjortshoej, Denmark (ESCSH), for their achievements in “Technology & Design” and Irish grid operator EirGrid’s “DS3 Advisory Council” in the “Communication & Participation” category. The LIFE Elia-RTE project focuses on biodiversity-friendly vegetation management under high-voltage grid lines, while “Pulse Heating” describes a district heating system using both pulse heat and solar panels to reduce heat losses in pipes and thus efficiently supply low-energy houses. EirGrid’s “DS3 Advisory Council” is comprised of a wide range of stakeholders that advise the Irish system operator on its way to creating the future of the Irish electricity system.

More information about the winners and 13 other commendable cases of the 2015 competition can be viewed in a brochure illustrating the top award contenders. The booklet can be downloaded on our website and introduces the reader to award submissions from grid operators 50Hertz, Mavir, EVN, RTE, Statnett, REE and TenneT, NGOs Germanwatch and NABU, infrastructure service provider Avacon, renewable energy association APERe and the German network agency BNetzA.

We thank ENTSO-E for hosting the award ceremony, the international audit and advisory company MAZARS for accompanying the process and our incredible jury for the time and expertise they contributed.

# BESTGRID

## Testing better practices

In October this year, BESTGRID came to a successful conclusion. The project that was funded under the framework Intelligent Energy Europe and initiated in April 2013, brought together five TSOs, two NGOs and one research institute to achieve three goals:

- To improve public acceptance for grids on local level by applying best practices regarding participation and transparency in pilot projects
- To speed up permitting procedures, while respecting environmental protection standards in pilot projects
- To ensure the implementation of best practices in future electricity „Projects of Common Interest“

The BESTGRID project was based on five pilot projects, located in the UK, Belgium and Germany. Three projects (the German projects Bertikow-Pasewalk and SuedLink and the Belgian Waterloo - Braine-l'Alleud) implemented new approaches to ensure the engagement of stakeholders. Two projects (the UK Nemo Link project and the Belgian Stevin project) conducted retrospective assessments of engagement and environmental protection and permitting activities that had already taken place.



What sets BESTGRID apart from other projects of its kind is that all initiatives were jointly developed. NGO partners played an active role in the design and implementation of activities and served as observers throughout the project, providing TSOs with feedback on the various measures taken.

The project was concluded with a final conference that took place in September and the publication of the final report “Testing Better Practices”. The report includes the ten most striking lessons learned throughout the project’s lifespan and is available on the project website: [www.bestgrid.eu](http://www.bestgrid.eu).

Members of the BESTGRID consortium and many of its stakeholders wish for the insights gained to be implemented in a multitude of further grid development projects. However, active engagement is often limited by resource constraints, especially in the case of NGOs. Members of the BESTGRID consortium and Advisory Board therefore support the idea of setting up an independent fund, which would provide resources to facilitate the cooperation of TSOs and NGOs to engage in grid-related activities, both at the strategic level and on the ground. RGI hopes to build on the experiences gained in BESTGRID and to put this idea into practice in the coming months and years.

# “ENERGY REGIONS IN TRANSITION”

## European energy expert tour to California



Between October 19th and 24th, RGI and the local Renewables 100 Policy Institute organised a best practice exchange tour to California for a delegation of European energy leaders, comprising senior TSO, NGO, regulator, government and academia representatives. Under the banner of “Energy Regions in Transition”, the delegation had high-level meetings on grid related issues that are relevant for both Europe and the United States. The purpose of the tour was for different groups of people dealing with very similar challenges to get acquainted with each other and lay the foundation for a long-term exchange between energy experts from both sides of the Atlantic. RGI is convinced that the energy transition will hugely benefit if many of its most involved players look beyond their own horizon, increase their expertise with respect to technical, financial, regulatory and societal solutions and deepen their understanding of the transferability of approaches to and from another regional context.

“The transformation of our energy system is exciting and challenging at the same time. The success



# POSITION”



of the on-going revolution will depend on the ability of actors to learn from each other, to share their experiences, formulate the right questions and jointly look for answers. Our aim is to foster the exchange of best practices for the benefit of all regions going through the energy transition“, RGI’s CEO Antonella Battaglini explains the rationale behind the “Energy Regions in Transition” programme.

The tour included visits to the Tesla factory and Stanford University, as well as discussions with

Silicon Valley technology companies, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), and Bloomberg New Energy Finance (BNEF). The annual Stakeholder Symposium of the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) on October 22-23 topped off the week, bringing together 1000 attendees, including energy executives, policy makers and the CAISO Board of Governors. During the Symposium, ten of our European delegates spoke on European perspectives with regard to the transition to a low-carbon grid and regional cooperation on two pan-

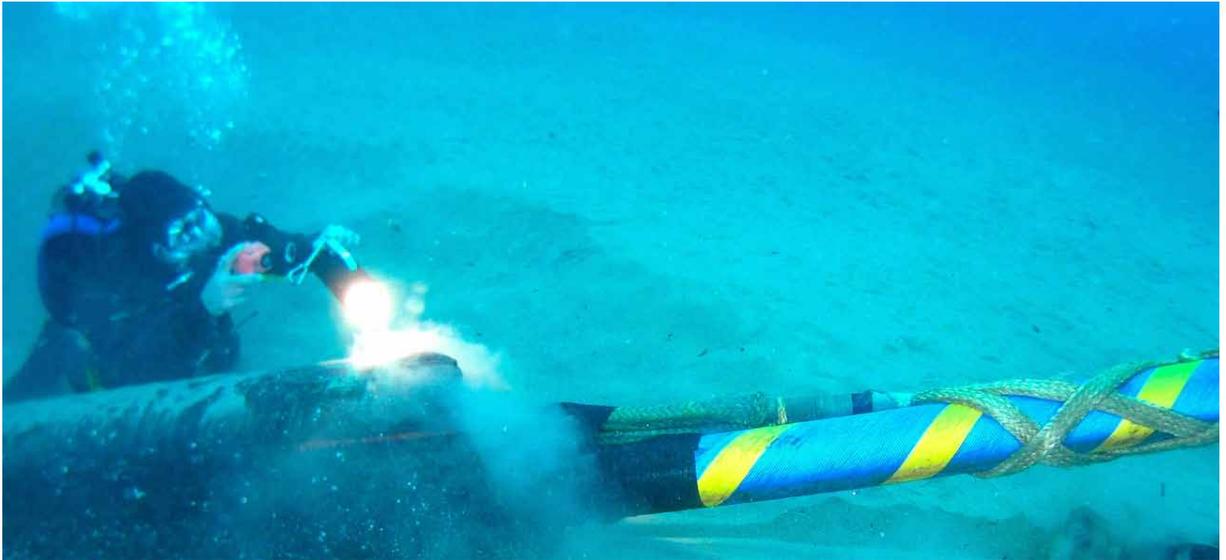


els moderated by RGI CEO Antonella Battaglini and BNEF founder Michael Liebreich.

The trip is the continuation of an exchange that has been initiated in 2013, when RGI invited Dave Olsen, member of the Board of Governors of CAISO, to a series of events in Brussels and Berlin, including the 3rd European Grid Conference.

# RGI'S WORK ON OFFSHORE GRIDS

## Understanding environmental impacts and identifying knowledge gaps



Power transmission via subsea cables is required to interconnect terrestrial grids, to supply offshore facilities and to connect renewable energy sources, such as offshore wind, wave and tidal power with the grid.

According to the ENTSO-E 2014 Ten-Year Network Development Plan, some 20.000 km of new subsea cables are needed by 2030, for an estimated investment cost of €50 billion.

In this context, environmental impacts associated with subsea cables, such as electromagnetic fields, subsea disturbance, thermal emissions or contamination need to be better understood. The challenges to assess and understand the (cumulative) effects of subsea cables on the marine environment are very real for permitting bodies, developers, investors and environmental protection organisations.

RGI intends to better understand these impacts, gather key environmental information and identify possible knowledge gaps. To this end, RGI organised the expert workshop "Offshore grid infrastructure: understanding cumulative impacts & exploring multi-functionality and environmental monitoring" in December 2015 and commissioned a review of



the impacts of subsea cables on the marine environment and key environmental information.

The commissioned work also included expert testimonials and outlined a set of nine recommendations for stakeholders to take forward, such as: improved procedures at the outset of project planning and knowledge sharing; improved guidance on environmental impact assessments (EIA), including EIA scoping and cumulative effect assessment; a clearer focus on research areas that would lead to a better understanding of different consenting requirements across countries; and an improved handling of knowledge gaps identified by current literature, the industry and relevant stakeholders.

# COMMUNITY COMPENSATION

## Exchanging good practices and developing recommendations

Intelligently designed community payments can be seen as a way to both increase local support and supply the appropriate gain to communities that host vital grid infrastructure. Many European TSOs expressed an interest in the independent development of consistent guidelines for providing community payments as part of their development package. This is important for the needed development of the electricity grid, as projects are often either blocked or slowed down considerably due to the opposition of local stakeholders, and the lack of local “value” seen in the project. RGI began working on this issue in late 2014, with the purpose of understanding the regulatory landscape across Europe, sharing current practices and identifying good practices that could be scaled up to a pan-European context.

Over the course of the year RGI held two engaging mini-workshops that brought together interested TSO and NGO partners from across Europe to share experiences and discuss possible best practices. Important contributions were garnered from 50Hertz, EirGrid, Terna and RTE with BirdLife Europe and Germanwatch providing the environmental protection and civil society perspectives. Discussions at the workshops addressed, among other topics, mechanisms for distributing money to communities, the role of authorities and regulators, legal and reputational risks for TSOs, the practical impact on project acceptance and issues of equity, democracy and justice. During discussions, five “key principles” for effective community payments were agreed upon amongst participants. These principles focused on ensuring payments made by TSOs for local projects would be based on pre-determined laws and guidelines that were set and governed in a fully transparent way.



Beyond this work, RGI is in the process of producing a brochure that sets out “on the ground” case study examples of community payment mechanisms currently being implemented across Europe. This will act as a knowledge-sharing tool for all those interested in this field, including TSOs, NGOs, regulators and local stakeholders.

# RGI EVENTS IN 2015

## Building personal relations and sharing best practices



RGI events are an integral part of our work and great opportunities to engage with our partners, friends and wider network. Topics we discussed in 2015 included the impacts of a more and more decentralised electricity system, the digitalisation of the power system, the implementation of PCI and the interplay of energy and democracy. Contributions from speakers and participants were as diverse as valuable: we had visionary speakers like Jeremy Rifkin, author of the “The Third Industrial Revolution”, unusual pairs that embraced the beauty of collaboration, like the Secretary-General of ENTSO-E, Konstantin Staschus, debating with CAN Europe Director Wendel Trio on the Grid Conference stage, and many partners that shared hands-on experiences from their work on the ground at our three BESTGRID events.



Our numerous participants engaged in personal discussions at different networking occasions, such as joint dinners or during a field trip to admire Terna’s innovative pylon design. We picked the brains of our guests via different discussion formats, a simulation game, and fishbowl as well as panel discussions.



One of our personal highlights in the 2015 event calendar was the third BESTGRID workshop that we dedicated to exchanging best practices. In February, more than 60 practitioners came to London to share their experiences regarding nature conservation and stakeholder engagement. A “speed-dating” at the very beginning of the workshop broke the ice and encouraged people to build up personal relations and talk about the lessons they have learned through their work. A “best practice fair” built the core of the event – showcasing eight different good practice examples at different information stands.

Feedback of the participants towards the idea of sharing best practices via personal interaction was exceptionally high. This is why we will continue to offer similar formats in the future and look forward to meeting many of you at one of RGI’s public events in 2016.

# GOVERNANCE

## Partners

RGI is a membership organisation with 16 partners from across Europe. They include the following grid operators and NGOs:

### TSOs



### NGOs



# GOVERNANCE

## Board, Secretariat



**Christoph Bals**

Policy Director at Germanwatch



**Olivier Feix**

Head of Nature Protection and Permitting at 50Hertz, Co-Chairman of the RGI Board



**Paul-Georg Garmer**

Senior Public Affairs Manager at TenneT, Treasurer of the RGI Board



**Ivan Scrase, Senior**

Climate Change Policy Officer at RSPB



**Dr. Stephan Singer**

Head Global Energy Policy at WWF International, Co-Chairman of the RGI Board



**Jörg Spicker**

Head of Market Operations at Swissgrid

### OUR BOARD

Inbetween the yearly Members' Assemblies, the Board is the highest decision making organ of the Renewables Grid Initiative association. It consists of at least six partner representatives, including two chairmen and a treasurer. The Board members are elected by the Members Assembly and shall consist of an equal number of TSO and NGO representatives. To speed up decision-making in daily matters, each RGI Board member has a dedicated responsibility. The people on the left were part of the RGI Board in 2015.

### Interview with Olivier Feix, Co-Chair of the RGI Board & Head of Nature Protection and Permitting at 50Hertz, on his 2015 RGI highlights:

1. From the perspective of the Board, what are RGI's most important achievements of 2015 and which activities should we build upon in 2016?

RGI's main strength is bringing the right people together in the right projects. The overarching goal is to harmonise nature protection, renewables and grid development. That is only possible if collaboration is combined with productive approaches and the mutual will to learn from one another. By developing positions on the meta-level and interlinking them with concrete projects on the ground, RGI has greatly fostered this exchange over the past years and has continued to do so last year. We had excellent workshops and activities on the ground and successfully concluded the BESTGRID project in 2015. I hope and believe that we can keep this momentum and build bridges for even closer on the ground cooperation between TSOs and NGOs in 2016.

2. The Board and the Secretariat ran the 2015 revision of RGI's strategy. What would you say are the most relevant outcomes of this process?

The strategy process was well carried out and dealt with the right issues. I think we have gained a lot of maturity through this process and we have developed clear scenarios for the coming years. Next

year, we should focus on creating an even more balanced funding strategy that combines membership fees, European funds and project funding in the smartest way possible.

3. *You were part of the „Energy Regions in Transition“ trip to California. What are your main take-ways from the journey?*

The joint trip to California has been immensely helpful in terms of alliance building, as has the BESTGRID project by the way. Without these two initiatives I would not have met and built valuable relationships with people who will become precious

allies in further developing our work in ecological corridor management, bird protection or our consideration of the marine environment in offshore grid projects. I also hope that we have given some constructive impulses to the ambitious colleagues we met in California and that we have conveyed to them how grid operators can actually contribute to a successful energy transition. On our side, we have definitely taken some lessons home that now enrich our discussions at 50Hertz, in particular with regard to battery technology and digitalisation.

## FUNDING

RGI gratefully acknowledges three different funding sources: membership fees from partner organisations; funding from the Mercator Foundation and the European Climate Foundation; and grants from the European Commission for the project INSPIRE-Grid.

## THE SECRETARIAT

The secretariat manages and coordinates all RGI activities. It develops and implements strategies and action plans, administers approved budgets, publicly represents RGI, networks and develops background briefings.



**Antonella Battaglini**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Antina Sander**  
Deputy Executive Director



**Kristina Steenbock**  
Senior Advisor



**Nikola Lesinski**  
Financial Manager



**Theresa Schneider**  
Senior Project Manager



**Julien Sialelli**  
Project Manager



**Stephanie Bätjer**  
Project Manager



**Andrew Carryer**  
Junior Project Manager



**Sylvia Kessler**  
Office Administrator



**Amelia Strzepek**  
Personal Assistant to the  
Chief Executive Officer



### **About RGI**

RGI is a unique collaboration of NGOs and TSOs from across Europe. We promote transparent, environmentally sensitive grid development to enable further steady growth of renewable energy and the energy transition.

More information:  
[www.renewables-grid.eu](http://www.renewables-grid.eu)

Copyrights  
©Fotolia: Front cover, p.11, back cover  
©Renewables 100 Policy Institute:  
p.4, 8, 9, back cover  
©50Hertz: p.7  
©TenneT: p.7  
©Terna: p.10, back cover

The Renewables Grid Initiative e.V.  
Krausenstraße 8 – 10117 Berlin – Germany