

# The Power of Collaboration

A short introduction to the work of RGI



**The Renewables Grid Initiative is a unique collaboration of environmental and social NGOs and transmission system operators from across Europe.**

**We promote transparent, environmentally sensitive grid development to enable the further steady growth of renewable energy and the energy transition.**



## Dear readers,

When in 2009 I started proposing that environmental protection groups (NGOs) and transmission system operators (TSOs) should actively cooperate if they were serious about renewables and the necessary infrastructure for it, many thought I had no idea how challenging this would be. Today, Members of the Renewables Grid Initiative (RGI) regularly challenge each other to constructively understand, define and take on new roles and responsibilities to support and facilitate the transformation of the energy system.

What still distinguishes RGI from other organisations is that it unites Members that typically represent two seemingly opposing sides with very different goals. Within RGI, they find themselves pursuing common objectives. We have grown into a forum where trust and the power of collaboration are fundamental pillars of a joint learning process. We believe in the saying “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

The energy transformation needs public support to become a success story. Building on diversity makes it possible for RGI to develop a narrative based on the perspectives and worldviews of different Members that resonates with citizens and a broad range of stakeholders. The energy transformation is a long journey into an unclear future. We need to reinvent our market designs, be willing to turn technological solutions upside down and embrace the idea that energy, and in particular electricity, is an inherent element of the democratic functioning of our societies, with society itself playing a key role. RGI is an invitation to envision this future, to describe it and to shape it by taking very concrete steps to make it happen. This flyer provides some initial information on our work with more to learn via our website, newsletter and public events or by contacting us directly.

We are looking forward to meeting you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "A Battaglini".

Antonella Battaglini  
CEO Renewables Grid Initiative



# A NEW GRID FOR A RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

Europe's energy system faces a number of challenges. Creating a market design that tackles the global problem of climate change, allows for very high shares of renewables and maintains system security and security of supply, requires both new ideas and swift action.

However, regions with the highest potential for renewable power are not always close to consumption centres and solar and wind resources are weather-dependent. New powerlines are often needed to connect generation sites with big consumer areas, and to allow for the flexibility to import electricity from other regions when the current weather does not fit load patterns. Thus, modernising and expanding the European electricity grid is an essential building block of the transition of Europe's

energy system from dependence on fossil fuels towards renewable energy. Yet, planning and realising grid development projects is often difficult and time consuming due to complex permitting procedures, potential local opposition and the challenges of minimising impacts on the local environment, nature and communities.

Many grid development projects face opposition from groups who question the purpose of the new powerline and have concerns about the protection of the local environment, potential health impacts or the possible depreciation of real estate values. Thus, listening to affected individuals and reconciling their objectives with those of grid operators is essential to continue with the development of our grids as well as the further roll-out of renewables.

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Modernising Europe's ageing grid requires willingness, commitment and co-operation from all actors. A decade into its mission, the Renewables Grid Initiative (RGI) continues to share our aim of building better infrastructure projects bridging national and regional borders within the EU. In this context I would recall that our 10% interconnection target for 2020 rises to 15% for 2030. By brokering dialogue between environmental organisations and transmission system operators, RGI is building a reliable narrative around sustainable infrastructure development, promoting transparency and creating opportunities for participation.

**Miguel Arias Cañete,**  
European Commissioner for Climate Action & Energy



# WE NEED UNUSUAL ALLIANCES FOR THE ENERGY TRANSFORMATION

It came as a surprise to many when TSOs and environmental NGOs, formerly considered to be opponents, announced that they would join forces in the Renewables Grid Initiative in 2009.

Players from both sides had become aware of their mutual interests in realising timely and environmentally sound grid development projects. For NGOs quickening the pace of integrating renewable energy into the electricity system and building lines in a way that minimises impacts on the environment is highly important.

TSOs, on the other hand, see that insufficient climate and environmental safeguards and a lack of transparency or public participation opportunities may prolong projects and fuel public opposition campaigns. Working together creates clear benefits for both sides and helps the establishment of personal relationships and trust based on experience. Moreover, working together creates opportunities to reach out to citizens and consumers providing more comprehensive and holistic approaches to the energy transition.



“NGOs and TSOs need to work together in order to navigate the enormous transformative change processes in the architecture and operation of European power grids that lie ahead. To comply with the targets of the Paris Agreement, renewable electricity generation across Europe will need to increase substantially in the years to come. Collaboration is key for mastering this system integration in a timely and adequate way from a societal, technical and environmental point of view. RGI is a great facilitator for cross-cultural exchange between professionals from all different backgrounds one can find in NGOs, TSOs and the large variety of stakeholders that are engaged in topics that matter for renewable system integration.”

**Eva Schmid,**  
**Team Leader German and European Climate Policy, Germanwatch**



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF OUR COLLABORATION

RGI is a pan-European alliance that considers the whole of the European electricity grid, inside and outside the European Union, on land and at sea. It is an association that paves the way for innovative collaboration on many levels between unusual partners.

From the original four founding Members, RGI has now grown into an organisation with more than twenty Members from across Europe.

The guiding principles for our collaboration have accompanied us for most of this time. In November 2011, RGI brought together a coalition of TSOs and NGOs to sign the "European Grid Declaration on Electricity Network Development and Nature Conservation" (EGD), followed by a second

part on increased transparency and public participation a year later. The two inter-related pieces of the declaration reflect our Members' commitment to develop the grid in an environmentally safe way, reduce the impact of powerlines on biodiversity, and better inform and involve relevant stakeholders and the broader public with respect to upcoming projects. In 2019 they are supplemented by the Marine Grid Declaration which brings RGI's core principles to network development in the marine environment.



Elia Group wants to be a leading European player. Today, I believe being a leader means clear positioning in supporting the move towards a low-carbon society based on high shares of renewables and contributing to a debate across both society and the energy sector. Cooperation with politicians, authorities, market players and civil society is key to master the challenges of the energy transition. We are committed to continuing an open and transparent dialogue with all stakeholders. We are proud of being a Member of RGI; the cooperation with NGOs in RGI helps us ensure that we keep on the right track, improve our projects and meet society's expectations. Elia and 50Hertz put all efforts in developing the grid according to the needs and ambitions of the coming decades.

**Chris Peeters,**  
CEO Elia Group



Grid extension is an essential precondition for substantive renewable energy integration from both decentralised and utility scale installations. We as TSOs want to invest in the grids that are needed for the energy transition and run the grid as efficiently and effectively as possible for this purpose. Bringing the necessary transformation to the power sector will require strong coalitions across different sectors in society. That's why TenneT is one of the founding Members of RGI which provides a platform for relevant stakeholders to foster the necessary development to enable 100% grid integration of renewables.

**Manon van Beek,**  
CEO TenneT



## GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING

RGI is a non-profit association registered under German law. It is funded by fees from Member organisations, public funding, such as the European Commission's LIFE funding scheme, philanthropic funders, such as the Mercator Foundation and the European Climate Foundation, as well as few sponsorships for projects and events.

The main bodies of the organisation are the Members' Assembly (MA), the Board and the Secretariat. The MA is the highest decision-making body, in which each Member is represented with one vote. In between MAs, the Board meets regularly to advise the Secretariat on both daily business and strategic decisions.

Portugal is setting very ambitious plans for 2030 and 2050. By 2030, 47% renewables in final energy and 80% renewables in electricity; by 2050, the country would achieve carbon neutrality with 100% electricity provided by renewables. For these goals, a strong involvement of non-governmental organisations and TSOs will be absolutely critical to guarantee that sustainability will be ensured throughout Portugal's roadmap and that interconnections with the rest of Europe will support a smooth transition. We see RGI as a crucial actor in facilitating this collaboration and ensuring that we reach our goals.

**Francisco Ferreira,**  
President of the Board, ZERO – Association for the Sustainability of  
the Earth System



# OUR WORK TOWARDS A SYSTEM BASED ON RENEWABLES

At its core, RGI is a platform for dialogue between TSOs and NGOs.

RGI promotes transparency and knowledge sharing through its **best practice** work where innovative and laudable practices in the realm of grid development are highlighted, shared, discussed, and actively improved. They are related to grid corridor management, the collection of relevant environmental data, offshore grid development, and community payment approaches, to name a few. Since 2014, RGI's '**Good Practice of the Year**' award honours outstanding practices in grid development. Best practices are also shared via publications, webinars and events.

This encourages the replication and re-interpretation of practices that have already proven to be successful in other regions.

RGI's **events** bring together stakeholders from different sectors, including civil society, industry, academia and politics, to promote dialogue and the exchange of knowledge. Every year, RGI organises an annual conference and several public workshops on different topics, such as underground cables, offshore grids and the synergies between grids and other areas of the energy sector. Increasingly, RGI tries to involve citizens' groups directly in its conversations.

RGI also looks beyond Europe to facilitate collaboration. Under the banner of "**Energy Regions in Transition**", we promote a regular exchange of energy-related best practices and experiences between different regions of the world, from the United States and Canada to China.



Electricity is indispensable for modern life and social inclusion. The electricity grid is the backbone of the system to deliver secure, competitive and clean energy to all Europeans. Figures show that the role of electricity will more than double by 2050. This increases the need for future-proof power grids. The Renewables Grid Initiative is a unique and innovative approach to build trust through communication, greater transparency and by bringing people closer together.

**Dominique Ristori,**  
Director General of DG Energy, European Commission



In our **'Implementing RGI Declarations (IRD)'** work, TSOs and NGOs collaborate at the national level to support the implementation of the principles recorded in RGI's grid declarations. NGOs actively bring in their specific knowledge with regards to nature protection, stakeholder engagement and presence on the ground while TSOs provide the technical expertise for implementation. This mutual knowledge exchange helps design better grid projects for the future.

Together with ENTSO-E, RGI started working on making the **Ten-Year Network Development Plan (TYNDP)** compliant with the Paris Agreement by maximising NGO participation and inputs into their scenario building process. The project was joined by the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSO-G), enabling a more comprehensive view of the energy system.

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RGI is a bridge. It bridges between the world of the NGOs that rightly defend sustainability and climate, as the most burning challenge that humanity faces, and the world of power networks on the other, that is European and cross border, and technical. Thanks to RGI and its important facilitation of coming up with a common agenda, we have learned together. We challenge ourselves and each other, and we deliver higher quality projects, together.

**Laurent Schmitt,**  
**Secretary-General, European Network of Transmission System  
Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E)**



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# RGI MILESTONES

**2017/  
2018**

**Implementing RGI  
Declarations:**  
First projects launched in  
Germany and Italy

**2014**

**Good Practice of the Year  
Award launched:**  
Identifying, awarding and  
disseminating good practices  
in grid development

**2015**

**'Energy Regions in  
Transition' launched:**  
sharing experiences  
beyond Europe

**2012**

**European Grid  
Declaration pt.2:**  
Committing to principles for  
inclusive and transparent grid  
development

**Best practice project launched:**  
Sharing experiences and learning  
from each other

**2013 - 2015**

**BESTGRID:**  
Cooperating in  
pilot projects on  
the ground

**2011**

**European Grid  
Declaration:**  
Setting principles  
for sustainable  
grid development

**2009 - 2011**

**First joint activities:**  
Publications and  
workshops

**2009**

**Memorandum of  
Understanding:**  
4 organisations  
establish RGI

# RGI MEMBERS



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