



Opening keynote by President von der Leyen at the European Hydrogen Week 2021

Brussels, 29 November 2021

Thank you very much Bart,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all – both here in Brussels and online – to the European Hydrogen Week. We gather today in, indeed, the aftermath of the Climate Conference in Glasgow. We all know the world is still not on track to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius. So we have to speed up significantly. Yet, I think progress was achieved in Glasgow on a number of key files. For example, from an understanding that global emissions must be cut by 45% by 2030 globally, to the fact that by now 90% of the countries have committed themselves to climate-neutrality. And clean hydrogen was among the hottest topics on the agenda of Glasgow, without any doubt.

There was a wealth of exciting new initiatives that saw the light in Glasgow. On our side, we launched a new partnership with Bill Gates' Breakthrough Energy Catalyst and the European Investment Bank. Catalyst will help scale up critical clean technologies, with a very specific focus on clean hydrogen. It was just one of the many hydrogen-related events in Glasgow that we saw. We saw, for example, new coalitions of private companies that pledged to step up their investment in clean hydrogen. We saw that big harbours in Europe and in the Americas created new shipping corridors for clean hydrogen between the shores of the Atlantic. Dozens of countries and businesses joined a Dutch-led initiative to clean up heavy-duty road transport, including through hydrogen.

Thus, the evidence is growing: Clean hydrogen will have a central place in the climate-neutral economy of the future. And I am very proud of Europe's role as the world's clean hydrogen trailblazer. At the beginning of this year, more than 200 new hydrogen projects have been announced globally. 55% of them are in Europe. So it is a leadership position that we have built through years. For instance, the European Union started before the rest of the world to invest in a new generation of electrolyzers, designed to be powered by renewable energy. As a result, Europe is now the world leader in patents and publications on this technology. Some of the largest electrolyzers of this new kind are already operating in Europe. For example, there is one in Linz, in Austria, which produces green hydrogen to power up a steel factory. We have financed it through our Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking.

And all these examples show that clean hydrogen is already contributing to de-carbonising our economy. And – even better, and that is important – it is beginning to be competitive also from an economic point of view. Because of the current rise in gas prices we all see, green hydrogen today can even be cheaper than grey hydrogen. Our target should be to bring the cost below EUR 1.8 per kilo by 2030. And this goal is within reach. We have to scale up clean hydrogen production, expand its applications, and create a virtuous circle where demand and supply feed each other and bring the prices down. That is the principle. This is without any doubt a global endeavour, but I want Europe to be leading the race. This is the time to invest in Europe's leadership on hydrogen, for our own sake and for the world's sake.

Now, how do we intend to do that? First, strong public investment to innovate and scale up. Second, international cooperation to build a global market for hydrogen. And third, our partnership with the private sector and researchers.

On my first point: If we are to meet our climate goals, we need to accelerate in the European hydrogen economy. This is why we have set the ambitious target to increase Europe's annual production of green hydrogen to 10 million tonnes already by 2030. This is a big step forward. We are now supporting this goal by investing in projects that are focused precisely on accelerating the hydrogen uptake. Just weeks ago, for example, we announced seven new projects worth over EUR 1 billion to be financed by our Innovation Fund. And four of them are hydrogen-related, from green steel in Sweden to carbon capture in France. We also asked our Member States to put a spotlight on hydrogen when drafting their national recovery plans – you know, NextGenerationEU. If we look at

the numbers, more than EUR 30 billion across our Union will go to clean energy investment, of course including, as a big pillar, clean hydrogen. Hydrogen valleys, we spoke about it, are a perfect example of the hydrogen economy we want to build.

Take, for example, the Groningen area – and thank you Bart for the video – in the Northern Netherlands. The region has large quantities of renewable energy from its offshore wind turbines. Two electrolyzers will use this renewable energy to produce green hydrogen. This hydrogen will then power up industries, it will fuel public transport, it will heat up homes, and be stored underground. By the end of 2025, the Northern Netherlands will host a complete green hydrogen value chain. And this hydrogen valley will create more than 20,000 jobs in the region. It is a project we are proud to support. And we are expanding the same model to other areas, there are many areas that want to follow, from the island of Mallorca to the border region between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia. This is how we can accelerate the hydrogen economy on a local scale, on our way towards a European hydrogen economy as a whole.

My second topic, I want Europe to be a front-runner, a front-runner while building a global market for hydrogen. Last spring, the European Commission was part of a coalition of countries pledging to create 100 hydrogen valleys around the world. Of course, we want the majority to be in Europe, so clean hydrogen is becoming part of the conversation with all our global partners, of course including our African partners. Africa has the greatest untapped potential for renewable energy production. Turning clean energy into clean hydrogen could be a solution to store that energy, both to sell it abroad and to power Africa's rising industry. It is with this in mind that I have proposed to invest in Africa's hydrogen sector, and thus creating a new clean hydrogen market between the two shores of the Mediterranean. It could bring clean energy to Europe, and sustainable development to the African continent.

Our entire hydrogen agenda is about cooperation. Both at the international level and, inside Europe, with the business world. This is why we have launched the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance. This Alliance has now more than 1,500 members. And it will present, of course, during this Hydrogen Week, a pipeline of viable investment projects in clean hydrogen. For the first time, we will have a clear picture of all hydrogen-related initiatives in Europe, linking ideas with potential investors.

This morning, we are launching the new Clean Hydrogen Partnership, bringing together the European Commission, the hydrogen industry, researchers and innovators as well as policy-makers from the Member States. This new Partnership builds on years of cooperation promoted by the Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking. And many thanks for that. And it brings that model to the next level. It is a new big step forward to bring innovative technologies from the laboratory to the factory and, ultimately, to European businesses and consumers.

The Climate Conference in Glasgow was a stark reminder that the world still has a long way to go towards climate neutrality. But today, clean technologies are rapidly becoming reality. The first hydrogen planes could fly in Europe's skies already in the next decade. And thanks to NextGenerationEU, our Investment Plan, European cities such as Zagreb will soon have hydrogen buses, or hydrogen-fuelled taxis in Copenhagen. Clean hydrogen is the energy of the next generation. So let us speed up the transition together, to reach climate neutrality by 2050 – it is a big goal – and to propel our economy already today.

Thank you very much for your attention and welcome to the European Hydrogen Week.

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