

International research collaboration opportunities fostering EU Clean Energy transition in Cyprus

1st June 2022, Nicosia

After the successful outcomes produced in Riga and in Sofia, on the 1st June 2022, the [SUPEERA project](#) team flew to Cyprus where, in collaboration with the [PANTERA Project](#), organised a workshop aimed at sharing best practices in the field of green energy and at fostering the engagement of external stakeholders in EERA activities and towards the implementation of the SET-Plan.

The workshop, which took place in hybrid modality, was joined by 18 participants on site and 24 online and it mainly gathered experts from the research sector, local organisations active in R&I activities, members of the government and representatives from the industry.

Welcome address

The workshop was officially opened by **Ivan Matejak**, SUPEERA Project Coordinator, and **Venizelos Efthymiou**, PANTERA coordinator and Chairman of [FOSS Research Centre](#), who welcomed the participants and presented the objectives of the workshop.



Mr Efthymiou proceeded with an overview of the PANTERA Project and he provided an insight into the [PANTERA RICAP process](#), a tool providing the main methodology on how EU initiatives' come together with stakeholders and other resources to unify and align forces under the same umbrella.

Thanos Athanasiou, Press Officer at the [EC Representation in Cyprus](#), opened with a reflection on the insufficient solar thermal panel installation rate in Cyprus, especially when associated with the number of sunny days on the island. Starting from this statement, Mr. Athanasiou underlined the need for Cyprus to multiply efforts and foster collaboration between authorities, research and industry in order to reach energy independence and to gain profits on the development and implementation of renewables.

Ivan Matejak presented the SUPEERA project and outlined the R&I gaps between EU13 and EU15 in terms of performance in the Horizon 2020 Programme. The displayed tables revealed that Cyprus' percentage of H2020 eligible proposals is higher than the EU13 average and almost twice as big as the European average. Nevertheless, Mr. Matejak highlighted, only 6% of the net amount of funds received has gone to research; the reasons for this are to be found in the low level of national investment in R&I, the young research community, the limited capacity of Cyprus industry and the scarce access to high-quality international networks.

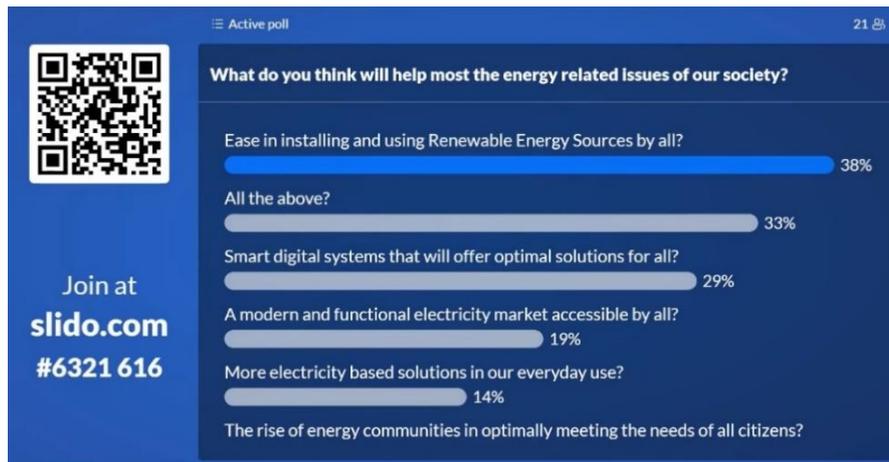
Nestor Fylaktos, Associate Research Scientist the [Cyprus Institute](#) (CYI), offered an interesting overview of R&I best practices for Cyprus. Mr. Fylaktos highlighted some of the lessons learned from the management of R&I projects, i.e.: defining proper budgeting, finding the right people, having the right management tools and holding efficient meetings. Based on these four key elements, Mr. Fylaktos illustrated: the [INSHIP Project](#) on solar heat for industrial processes, the [CySTEM Project](#) on solar and thermal energy, the [SFERA III Project](#) on mobility of researchers and shared use of research infrastructure and, last, the [Green Deal Project](#) providing scientific support for the implementation of the EU Green Deal in Cyprus. Mr. Fylaktos closed his presentation by sharing four important tips learned more specifically in the management of energy related projects: joining alliances, embracing multi-disciplinarity, working with diverse stakeholders and supporting collaborations among local, regional and international scientific institutions.

The panelists' presentations prompted an interesting discussion which was moderated by **Ivan Matejak**. **Mr Efthymiou** took the floor arguing that when we talk about Cyprus' performance in R&I in statistical terms, it is important to always keep in mind the small size of the country and its low number of inhabitants: it is only by taking these elements into account that we get a realistic (and also rather positive) picture of the situation. On his side, **Mr Athanasiou** shed light on another problem affecting CET in the EU, which is the inability for the EC to enforce decisions to Member States and called for a stronger EU able to impose itself more on the prerogatives of the EU Council.

Theodoros Zachariadis, Associate Professor at the CYI, underlined the great role of Cyprus in the region and outlined how it teams up with countries from Central and Eastern Europe and Western Asia to design common energy and climate strategies and to bring the performance of the global energy community forward.

Panel discussion

The panel session opened with a question that addressed both panellists and audience and which represented the basis for the following discussion e.g.: what do you think will help most the energy related issues of our society? The majority of participants answered: "ease and installing renewable energy sources by all" whereas the second favourite chosen answer was "smart digital systems that will offer optimal solutions for all".



Nicos Hadjinicolaou, Industrial Extension Officer at the [Ministry of Energy of Cyprus](#), explained that the Ministry is working towards easing the implementation of renewable energy sources across the country by acting on two fronts: by enforcing regulations to make the installation of PV compulsory for new households and by granting incentives for families and businesses that decide to install PV on existing buildings.

Venizelos Venizelou, Energy Engineer at [Cyprus Energy Regulatory Agency](#) (CERA), stated that CERA promotes schemes that are structured to promote the renewable energy by encouraging the establishment of renewable energy communities, collective self-consumption and all provisions coming out of the electricity directive.

Anna Maria Christoforou, Scientific Officer at the [Research and Innovation Foundation](#) (RIF), explained that RIF (mainly subsidized through government structural funds) has been providing funding, of minimum 1 million euros each, in specific projects that are submitted by researchers to improve efficiency and make the energy systems more innovative.

Alexandros Nicolaidis from [Cyprus Transmission System Operator](#) underlined the importance to work hand in hand with other stakeholders in order to ensure that all the resources and technologies are coming at the right time so that supportive solutions (for energy storage for instance) catch up with the rapid deployment of new technologies.

On the same topic, **Mr. Hadjinicolaou** intervened and claimed the need to support initiatives aimed at ensuring energy efficiency for their vital role in reducing energy demand which is a first important step towards a more effective and better functioning energy system.

After the discussion, **Mr Venizelou** outlined the core activities and R&I Projects of CERA and presented a paper on "[Regulatory Sandboxes in Incentive Regulation](#)" seeking to provide clarity and a framework for the different tools that energy national regulatory authorities can use to facilitate innovation in the context of incentivizing regulation for grid operators. On the topic of technology maturity in Cyprus, Mr Venizelou underlined that the country is still in the process of digitalising the electricity sector and important steps have to be taken to fully adopt the flexibility of the energy market.

Throughout the following Q&A session, panelists had the opportunity to answer ad hoc questions specifically regarding their area of expertise.

On the importance of the living environment for meeting energy objectives, **Mr. Hadjinicolaou** highlighted two main points. After shedding light on the great relevance of transport share in

Cyprus' energy consumption, he claimed that a special attention should be paid to this sector since it involves a lot of stakeholders and requires lots of structural and behavioral changes from the side of the citizens as well. In addition, Mr. Hadjinicolaou focused on another issue that is concerning not only Cyprus but all countries in general, which is the lack of interest/motivation of the private sector to invest in R&I, an area that is almost completely funded through public resources.



Asked on Cyprus' response to the 5th pillar of the energy union on “research, innovation and competitiveness”, **Ms Christoforou** listed some of the most important national tools that the country has adopted to comply with the green energy targets. Among the mentioned regulatory instruments there

was the [Smart Specialization Strategy for Cyprus](#), which was adopted in 2015 and aims at supporting R&I activities and investments while fostering cooperation between the academic community and the business world in established thematic areas, including energy. Ms Christoforou concluded her intervention by recalling that while it is important to have funding for basic science and bottom-up research, it is equally significant to have targeted thematic areas.

On the issue of adopting a more holistic approach encompassing also social and economic, not just engineering criteria, **Mr Venizelou** stated that active citizenship is part of CERA's strategy. Such commitment is reflected in activities like the development of a price comparison tool that will enable citizens to check the tariffs of the various suppliers that are registered to the market thus offering them the opportunity to easily switch their energy provider if they find it convenient. In the same vein, **Mr Hadjinicolaou** confirmed that the involvement of the consumer is one of the policy pillars of the Ministry and added that the government is working towards making the CET in Cyprus as much of a democratic process as it can be by also involving diverse groups of stakeholders from both public and private sectors.

On top of the previous comments and intervention, **Mr Efthymiou** stressed the importance of cooperation with the authorities on activities addressing energy issues.

The first session was wrapped up by panellists with short conclusive remarks statement on what are the major barrier for the Cypriot research community in reaching 2030 - 2050 energy goals. Among others, speakers mentioned: alignment of interests from different stakeholders; alignment of researchers towards societal needs, the need to catch up with the rapid changes, the need to align clarity, coordination and trust.

The second part of the workshop focussed on national and European funding opportunities and was opened by **Anna Maria Christoforou** who introduced 4 funding programmes aimed at accelerating the green energy transition in Cyprus: the National Funding Programme, organised through the



Restart Work Programme (130 Million euros), the [CO-DEVELOP Green Transition Programme](#) aiming at bridging the gap between industry and Academia (6 million euros), the CET Partnership covering 7 transition Initiatives (3 million euros) and the Climate Neutral, Sustainable and Productive Blue Economy Partnership (2 million euros).

Evgenios Epaminondou from the Deputy Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digital Policy ([Directorate for Research and Innovation](#)) gave an overview of Cyprus R&I governance system and strategy with a focus on the energy sector. Mr Epaminondou showed that Cyprus ranks 1st in the absorption of H2020 funds per capita in the EU¹ and gave an overview of the current research ecosystem of the country, including 10 Universities, 8 research institutes, 6 Centres of Excellence and more than 2100 researchers. After presenting the Smart Specialisation Strategy, Mr Epaminondou also mentioned some of the most relevant European Initiatives of which Cyprus is part: the CET partnership, ERA discussion and actions, Euromed R&I initiatives, the ESFRI Projects and the Technical Committee 5 on research innovation, competitiveness and digitalisation.



Berta Matas Güell, Senior Researcher at [SINTEF](#), gave a presentation on [EEA and Norway Grants](#) for the period 2014-2021, directly addressing the so-called EU13 States. Ms Matas showed the programme's structure, the eligibility criteria and concluded with examples of new cooperation

agreements signed with Cyprus on a number of new programmes in 2019, that also aimed at reducing vulnerability to climate change and improving environmental status.

¹ STOCKwatch (2021), "Cyprus first among EU Member States on funds absorption", source: <https://www.stockwatch.com.cy/en/article/voyli-eyropi-oikonomia/cyprus-first-among-eu-member-states-funds-absorption#:~:text=Cyprus%20ranks%20first%20among%20EU,EU%20average%20being%20at%2062%25>.

Venizelos Efthymiou and **Kyriaki Psara** from FOSS concluded the second session of the workshop with a presentation of the PANTERA Project and the [EIRIE Platform](#) in support of the R&I community in Cyprus. Mr. Efthymiou described the EIRIE Platform as the meeting point of all actors active in the fields of green energy and as the tool aimed at bridging the gaps that currently exist in the energy field between EU MS, by bringing together successful national, regional or European partnerships. Mr. Efthymiou gave a general overview of EIRIE's vision, key functionalities, user roles, value propositions whereas Ms Psara took over the presentation by going more into details in the platform's open architecture and functionalities.

Mr. Efthymiou closed the workshop by remarking the importance of communication among the R&I community and by noting the relevance of these kinds of events for exchanging best practices and for fostering collaboration at different levels.

Closing Remarks

Despite the small size of the country, Cyprus' research community is very active in the field of CET, a trend that is reflected in the country's performance in Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe Programmes and in its involvement in 10 out of 14 SET Plan IWGs. Nevertheless, several are still the barriers that prevent Cyprus from further increasing its performances in the R&I and energy fields.