Reaction European Hydrogen Valleys Partnership on REPowering the EU with Hydrogen Valleys (roadmap) (europa.eu)

The European Hydrogen Valley Partnership provided feedback concerning the EU Hydrogen Valley roadmap, on several occasions. We co-organised the workshop “Towards an EU Roadmap for Hydrogen Valleys – Regional actors and their role” on 28 February 2023. On 1 March, former Regional Minister Tjisse Stelpstra handed over a position paper to then Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, which highlighted the suggestions and key demands of Europe’s leading hydrogen regions. We have attached the position paper for your reference.

Hereunder, we would like to present eight concrete suggestions:

1. We believe the roadmap should be rather be published in the form of a communication instead of as a staff working document, and should outline concrete actions and recommendations.

2. We urge the Commission to speed up the notification of IPCEI hydrogen projects. The stakeholders in our Hydrogen Valleys need clarity for their investments and planning. The pending third wave of infrastructure notifications is urgent.

3. There should be a more tailored and dedicated support for small and medium-sized hydrogen projects. Better and clearer communication and assistance towards the EU Member States and regions should be provided by the Commission regarding the GBER and the CEEAG tools and how to promote and overcome national and regional bottlenecks regarding small and medium-sized hydrogen projects. This concerns both the availability of financial resources and the removal of legal barriers. For example, it is very difficult for regional authorities to co-finance smaller projects without risking conflict with state aid rules. This is much easier for large projects, e.g. IPCEI. In addition, it is important to note that in these kinds of small and medium projects, support to OPEX, and not only to CAPEX, for hydrogen production should also be considered.

4. The roadmap must provide a transparent, binding and clear definition of Hydrogen Valleys. This definition should be based on the recognition as Mission Innovation “European Hydrogen Valley” and/or recognised projects under the Clean Hydrogen Partnership (former FCH JU) calls for proposals for Hydrogen Valleys. Proposals such as the Net-Zero Industry Act (which refers to hydrogen valleys in Art.10 without describing which projects qualify as such) should use this definition.

5. Connecting hydrogen projects, stakeholders and ecosystems disseminated all over Europe is a key step towards building a strong European hydrogen economy. Transnational Hydrogen Valleys, either cross-border or along major transport corridors involving several member States, are instrumental to achieve such a goal. Many regions are ready for this next step as transnational Hydrogen Valley, as already demonstrated in several joint Interreg projects involving for instance the Northern Netherlands and Lower Saxony or regions from the North Sea area (including Dutch, Belgian and French regions). The roadmap must ensure more funding from the Clean Hydrogen Partnership on this aspect.

6. Hydrogen Valleys can be used as regulatory sandboxes to experiment with new laws and regulations. Nevertheless, we ask the Commission to quickly clarify what these sandboxes could look like and what the benefits will be for participating regions and projects.

7. The Commission proposes in its Net-Zero Industry Act to establish Net-Zero Industry Academies. These should tie in with existing initiatives such as the project ‘GreenSkills4Hydrogen’, with 34 partners from 15 European countries, in which schools from several regions participate. In addition to this European initiative, several regions in Europe are developing H2-focused curricula, such as the Hydrogen Valley Campus Europe and Greenwise Campus in the Northern Netherlands, the Interuniversity Master's Degree in Hydrogen Technologies developed by 5 Spanish universities from Basque Country, Aragón, and Catalonia or the hydrogen qualification at the Center for Lifelong Learning (C3L) of the University of Oldenburg in Lower Saxony. These campuses can be further developed into
Net-Zero Industry Academies. Cross-border cooperation should be stimulated within and through these campuses. To make this a success, the EU has to make resources available to support these initiatives.

8. We ask the European Commission for support to the S3 European Hydrogen Valleys Partnership as the largest regional partnership at the European level in order to work hand in hand with the Commission and the Clean Hydrogen Partnership JU with the expertise of the regions in further developing the number and extent of Hydrogen Valleys in Europe.

We are looking forward to further cooperating on this topic and engaging with the Commission in order to increase the roll-out of European Hydrogen Valleys.