

7 December 2015, by Giuseppe Lorubio

EVENT DISCUSSES EURELECTRIC'S RECIPE FOR DELIVERING A NEW DEAL FOR ENERGY CONSUMERS

On 2 December, EURELECTRIC organised its second yearly retail conference as an opportunity for energy stakeholders to discuss the July European Commission's policy communication "Delivering a new deal for energy consumers." A brand new EURELECTRIC innovation website went live on the occasion of the event, highlighting the great strides being made by the industry to become more customer-centric and to ensure that innovation becomes the new normal in a market plagued by customer inactivity.

Joachim Balke, from the cabinet of Energy & Climate Commissioner Arias Cañete, kicked-off the event with a keynote speech which delved on the pillars of the July communication: consumer empowerment; smart homes and networks; data management and protection. He then recalled the need for better linking of wholesale and retail markets and confirmed that a host of new legislative proposals will be developed to provide a comprehensive package of actions by the end of next year. His speech was followed by a scene-setter presentation by Bloomberg New Energy Finance's Tom Rowlands-Rees, whom EURELECTRIC had asked to provide the facts needed to underpin any serious discussion on retail markets. Using extensive datasets, Mr Rowlands-Rees showed the known experience curves for a number of downstream technologies such as rooftop photovoltaics and battery storage, and went on to stress that competition is poised to accelerate in the connected home space, at the boundary between the energy, telecom and cable/satellite industries. In a world of decreasing electricity sales as well as utility margins half the size of those of adjacent industries, electric utilities should be looking at bundles as a silver lining, he concluded.

Electrabel's Annette Kroll opened the first session of the event by presenting EURELECTRIC's recipe for delivering on the much-talked energy new deal. Her presentation sparked the ensuing panel discussion with consumer association BEUC – represented by Monika Stajnarova –, the European Commission – DG Energy's Eero Ailio –, energy Regulators – VREG's Dirk van Evercooren – and utility industry – Antonio Coutinho, Chairman of EURELECTRIC's Retail Customers Committee. The discussion was particularly lively and looked at several of the aspects of the European Commission's proposals, from supplier switching to price regulation, from offer comparability to the continued use of the electricity bill as a carrier of fiscal/policy costs. Remarkably, an agreement was found on a few EURELECTRIC policy asks, namely the call on Member States to stop financing unrelated costs on the electricity bill – though the agreement stopped short of addressing sector-related policy costs – and the call on the Commission to avoid coming up with standardised obligations on bills.

The second session looked at innovation as the building block of future-proof retail markets. The session kicked-off with the launch of a new innovation webpage on EURELECTRIC's website. Attention was chiefly drawn on the 'Innovation for customers' section, which provides a platform for showcasing existing commercial offers in a number of fields: innovative price structures & demand response; smart homes & smart living; electric/smart mobility; personalised information and advice; distributed generation; storage; B2B energy management services; and bundles of services. By clicking on the company logos, users are redirected to the company webpages on which a presentation of the offer as well as its terms and conditions are provided. The event continued with three presentations by Essent's Griet van Waeyenberge, EDF's Patrick Bayle and Glen Dimplex's Rowena McCappin, each showing one or more features of the innovative solutions their companies are developing. Mrs van Waeyenberge was then joined on stage by Manuel Sanchez from DG Energy, Bundesverband Neue Energiewirtschaft's Bianca Barth, and Iberdrola's Rodolfo Martinez Campillo for a final panel debate. This discussion was lively too, and looked inter alia at the regulatory issues around demand response, treatment of prosumers, the prospects of digitisation, etc.

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