

Hungary's Environmental Agenda: An Interview with Anikó Raisz

As July approaches, Hungary prepares to take over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union from Belgium. In an exclusive interview with Paolo Falcioni, APPLiA's Director General, Dr. Anikó Raisz, Secretary of State for Environment and Circular Economy at Hungary Ministry of Energy, outlined the nation's priorities for its term.

"Balance" is the keyword

During APPLiA's 2024 General Assembly in the heart of Budapest, Paolo Falcioni sat down with Anikó Raisz to reflect on Hungary's upcoming presidency and its agenda, shedding light on the country's initiatives and looking forward to future challenges.

According to the Secretary of State, Hungary's presidency represents both a challenge and an opportunity, as it will coincide with the initiation of a new constitutional cycle. The country aims to revitalize the voices of member states, sometimes overshadowed by the dominant role of other institutions, especially concerning environmental policy. One of the foremost challenges on Hungary's agenda will be to maintain European businesses' competitiveness while meeting the Green Deal's environmental objectives, stated Mrs Raisz, recognising that a strong European economy is essential for global environmental advocacy and achieving ambitious climate targets. Paolo Falcioni highlighted sustainability as a central tenet of Hungary's vision, which Raisz confirmed. Noting the importance of replacing old, energy-intensive appliances with energy-efficient ones but also the value of repair and reuse, she agreed that individual governments could aid the transition through public subsidies, balancing immediate economic burdens on families with long-term carbon-saving benefits.

With this regard, Hungary has made significant progress in replacing outdated household appliances, with nearly one-tenth of Hungarian households benefiting from public programs over the past decade. *"Up to half of the price of high-performing appliances has come directly from the government, making it much easier for consumers to switch to more energy-efficient models"* Mrs Raisz explained. This approach not only reduces energy bills but also diminishes the overall environmental impact, showcasing the effectiveness of government-backed initiatives in driving sustainability. Tackling the logistical challenges of reaching rural areas, she described how the Hungarian government, local authorities, and community organizations collaborated to set up distribution centers and offer financial incentives. *"Even the most remote households could benefit from these programs"* she remarked, emphasizing the importance of making these initiatives accessible to everyone. The impact of these programs has been profound, according to Raisz, Hungary has seen a notable reduction in energy consumption, leading to lower utility bills and decreased greenhouse gas emissions. *"Our efforts have not only improved energy efficiency but also*



raised public awareness about sustainable practices" she added. Reflecting on her personal experience, she highlighted the combination of both durability and efficiency as something that many consumers are looking for today. Innovation is at the heart of Hungary's strategy, with advancements in smart sensors and cooling technologies for refrigerators and freezers. *"Supporting technological advancements through funding and incentives is crucial"* said Raisz. These innovations are improving both efficiency and the overall performance and lifespan of household appliances.

The concept of a circular economy was another major point of discussion. Dr. Raisz explained that designing appliances for easy repair, reuse, and recycling is key to minimizing waste. Hungary's regulatory framework encourages manufacturers to create longer-lasting products and to invest in recycling infrastructure. Looking ahead, she acknowledged challenges such as changing consumer behavior and building the necessary infrastructure for repair and recycling.

"The industry vision is a transition towards efficient energy usage through the replacement of old, energy-consuming appliances with energy-saving ones in households. While repair and reuse play their roles - particularly with younger appliances and consumer education - they may not be sufficient for replacing old appliances. The potential for carbon savings is significant, but many families lack the financial means to undertake such replacements. Individual governments can provide assistance in this regard by offering public subsidies." Paolo Falcioni remarked.

A Single Market for economic sustainability

Mrs. Raisz asserted that the Single Market is a critical enabler of economic competitiveness and highlighted the need to minimize deviations from common market rules by member states. She acknowledged the difficulty businesses face when navigating disparate regulations across the EU, advocating for balanced, uniform rules to make products more environmentally friendly and sustainable.

During the discussion, Falcioni addressed the topic of the European proposal on Green Claims, inquiring about its potential significance for Hungary. Mrs. Raisz affirmed that Green Claims is a crucial issue for Hungary. She emphasized the need for transparency and fairness in advertising, particularly regarding environmental claims, and highlighted Hungary's dedication to fostering transparent and fair advertising practices. Furthermore, she advocated for proactive legislative measures to drive positive change within the industry.

By reinforcing the voices of member states and enhancing competitiveness while ensuring environmental sustainability, the upcoming term under Hungary's leadership aims to foster cooperation, transparent practices, and a balanced approach to policy-making, with a promise to be a period of significant strategic focus and collaborative effort across Europe.

