



Event report document

# Reference Document for Annual Political Dialogue 2022

Asturias 7 July 2022

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The third Annual Political Dialogue of the [Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition](#) took place on 7 November 2022 in Asturias, Spain. The meeting was co-organised by the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Initiative, together with the Principality of Asturias.

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## Welcome and introduction

### RECORDING

Master of Ceremony: Robert Pollock, Secretariat of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition

The third Annual Political Dialogue of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition was opened by Robert Pollock who outlined relevant policy developments since the last [Annual Political Dialogue in Görlitz in 2019](#), including Europe's commitment to climate neutrality by 2050, the [European Green Deal](#), the [Fit for 55 Package](#), [Just Transition Mechanism](#) and [Just Transition Fund](#). He also highlighted recent challenges faced by transition stakeholders such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To conclude, he highlighted the need to maintain the momentum of just transition and the importance of this event to facilitate the dialogue.

#### Speakers:

- **Alfredo Canteli Fernández**, Mayor of Oviedo
- **Kadri Simson**, EU Commissioner for Energy (remotely)
- **Teresa Ribera**, Vice-president and Minister for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge
- **Adrián Barbón**, President of the Government of the Principality of Asturias

Alfredo Canteli Fernández welcomed all participants to the city and outlined the history of mining in Asturias. Based on his experience, he identified good practice in transition, including the importance of analysing the needs of the region and its international/political context. The war in Ukraine has led to unexpected consequences and made a range of structural problems and energy dependencies more apparent. Mr Canteli Fernández insisted that the energy transition should not be postponed and that renewable energies should be seen as growth drivers in the crisis. Finally, he pointed to the roles of companies and civil society in the transition process and the mayor's office's commitment to its citizens.

Kadri Simson's speech focussed on the progress in recent years in coal- and carbon-intensive regions. She pointed to the success of the Coal regions in transition Initiative and its technical assistance facility (START) which has become an important platform for actors to learn and exchange knowledge on coal phase-out. New instruments, such as the Just Transition Fund and the other pillars of the [Just Transition Mechanism](#), will also offer support for the transition of industries from the end of 2022. Ms Simson acknowledged the need to restart coal power plants given the energy crisis, however, she emphasised that these are temporary emergency responses and that the path to climate neutrality and the ambitions of [RepowerEU](#) remain the same. Work with Ukraine on coal phase-out as well as other third countries such as Indonesia and Vietnam will continue.

Teresa Ribera raised the important contribution and legacy of Asturias and other European coal regions in underpinning economic progress in the continent. She thanked the European Commission for their understanding of the subject's sensitivity and the consequences of coal phase-out. The economic reality of coal regions cannot be changed immediately and there is a need to address the social impact of transition in a sustained manner and provide meaningful support to businesses. In Spain, coal transition was planned and accompanied by the newly established Institute for Just Transition which helped develop the post-coal vision and strategy and led the tri-party negotiations with trade unions and companies. Knowledge exchange with other European partners has also been of great help and now Asturias is developing stimulating project proposals regarding energy transformation (for example, in relation to renewable energies, energy storage, research, and grid systems in rural areas). Ms Ribera identified the determining factors for a just transition, i.e., finding consensus, dialogue between stakeholder groups, and participation of citizens in decision making. Finally, she underlined the importance of retaining the quality of life in the region of Asturias and attracting new talent and the business sectors of the future.

Adrián Barbón emphasised the immense eco-transition that Asturias is undergoing. After years of political dialogue and planning, the former coal region is re-industrialising and transforming into a green and digital economy. An allocation of EUR 263 million from the Just Transition Fund will assist the reinvention of the region to become a renewable energy hub with powerful enterprises working in energy storage and vectors. Further national funds (EUR 60 million) will be used to restore three mines and redevelop them as manufacturing hubs. To close, Mr Barbón noted that the global energy transition must respect its local impacts and that the region of Asturias can serve as an example to other regions in transition.

Following the live speeches, a video recording from two Ukrainian mayors, Andrii Zalivskyy from Chervonohrad (Lviv region) and Oleksandr Brykalov from Myrnohrad (Donetsk region) was shown. The mayors underlined the continued commitment to coal phase-out despite the challenging times in their country. They thanked the EU for giving Ukraine [candidate status](#) and emphasised that decarbonisation remained high on the agenda, and was a way to rebuild what has been destroyed. Ukraine wants to remain a reliable partner of Europe although the current focus has necessarily shifted to military matters and the support of displaced people. Disconnection from gas, water and heat supply is also causing difficulties. Despite this, the mayors voiced their commitment to the green transition.

## Session 1: Future of Energy & Energy Security: EU Coal regions in a fast-changing energy world

This session had two separate panel discussions. The panels focussed on the need to accelerate the transition to clean energy to keep prices in check and ensure the energy independence of the EU in the next decade, highlighting short-term, mid-term, and long-term solutions as well as the contribution of coal regions to achieve the European Green Deal objectives. The first panel brought together policymakers from different levels and regions to discuss the current/future policy framework. The second panel focussed on policy implementation with representatives of industry, trade unions and NGOs.

**Discussions led by:** Kira Taylor, Energy and Environment Reporter, Euractiv

### Part 1: Future of Energy & Energy Security in EU coal regions: policy framework

▶ RECORDING

#### Panellists:

- **Adela Tesarova**, Head of Unit, DG ENER, European Commission
- **Laura Martin Murillo**, Director General-Institute for Just Transition, Spain
- **Susana Solís Pérez**, MEP, European Parliament
- **Jonás Fernández**, MEP, European Parliament
- **Radim Sršeň**, Deputy Minister of Regional Development, Czech Republic
- **Maciej Sytek**, Plenipotentiary of the Management Board of the Wielkopolska Region for Restructuring of Eastern Wielkopolska, Poland

Adela Tesarova introduced the EU policy framework for transition, the European Green Deal. She pointed to a variety of available financing and support tools (technical assistance, events to share experiences/knowledge) offered at the European level. Speaking from the national level, Laura Martin Murillo presented the policies that enabled just transition in Spanish coal regions (National comprehensive plan for energy; Just Transition Strategy) and shared two examples of how mining infrastructure has become a renewable energy source through repurposing. Finally, she emphasised the need for European solidarity in the current and likely worsening energy crisis.

Maciej Sytek and Radim Sršeň outlined the policy contexts from Wielkopolska (Poland) and the Czech Republic. Mr Sytek pointed to Wielkopolska's goals of achieving climate neutrality

in 2040 and phasing out coal in energy/heat generation until 2030. Wielkopolska has exchanged with and inspired other Polish regions to follow suit – the key challenge will be to create new jobs and business opportunities and give a new identity to the former coal regions. From the national level, Mr Sršeň explained that energy is a priority of the current [Czech Council presidency](#), especially the synergies between transition and cohesion policy. He noted that the situation in Czechia was one of the most difficult, given the country's history and dependency on energy-intensive industries. Nevertheless, just transition is seen as an integral part of Czechia's future and is one of the key components of the Strategy for regional development. Transition tools and support facilities from the EU have been of great help as have exchanges with other European coal regions through twinning projects. However, the timely spending of the Just Transition Fund is seen as challenging.

When asked whether the currently available policy tools for transition were enough to support regions, MEP Susana Solís Pérez replied that many funds are now available (Just Transition Fund, Cohesion Funds, Modernisation Fund, Recovery and Resilience Fund) but all need to be spent in the near term. Regions should be the key players in spending and managing these funds, given their proximity to citizens. Technical assistance is also seen as an important support tool. MEP Solís Pérez called for the European Commission to be flexible in these challenging times (high inflation, potential cut-off from Russian gas). MEP Jonás Fernández identified the need for a more rapid transition to achieve the goals set out in the Paris agreement, despite budgetary constraints, COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Additional budgetary efforts should be made via RepowerEU to improve supply and energy infrastructure.

The information/experience gap between Brussels (the European Commission) and the coal regions was raised. Adela Tesarova identified that the just transition movement had started with the regions pushing for the Just Transition Fund to be established. She noted that the European Commission was working directly with affected regions and that [Annual Political Dialogues and Just Transition Platform Meetings/Conferences](#) taking place twice a year have been crucial in bringing together stakeholders. MEP Solís Pérez echoed the need for meetings among stakeholders to remain informed about the local issues. She noted that further flexibility with available funds and their spending was possible if citizens, businesses and industry can benefit from it. MEP Jonás Fernández also recognised the need to bring coal regions closer to the EU institutions and to better understand their needs.

Maciej Sytek reiterated the need for flexibility in spending Just Transition Funds and funds from NextGenerationEU, especially in poorer regions. Radim Sršeň pointed to the need for more subsidiarity and a place-based approach for transition and voiced interest in future events to share experiences and build capacity. Laura Martin Murillo underlined the importance

of the coal regions in transition Initiative to bring together European and local stakeholders to find common ground. MEPs Solís Pérez and MEP Fernández pointed to the many uncertainties and challenging times ahead. These can, however, be overcome with the existing policy framework and a clear decarbonisation agenda. Finally, Adela Tesarova re-emphasised the enormous potential of coal regions in transition to utilise the knowledge from the Initiative and [Just Transition Platform](#) to reinvent themselves and become again the drivers for European growth.

## Part 2 - Future of Energy & Energy Security in EU coal regions: policy implementation



**Keynote speech: Katie Treadwell**, Senior Energy Policy Officer, Europe Beyond Coal (remotely)

### Panellists:

- **Ana Marques**, CEO of EDP, Spain
- **Anelia Stefanova**, Energy Transformation Area Leader, CEE Bankwatch Network
- **Juan Alvarez Avello**, Head of Business Development Iberia & Morocco, Endesa Generación, Spain
- **Judith Kirton-Darling**, Deputy General Secretary, IndustriAll-Europe
- **Julio Castro**, CEO Renewable Energy, Iberdrola, Spain

The second panel was opened with a keynote speech by Katie Treadwell. She stressed the links between the cost-of-living crisis and climate change, as both are driven by fossil fuel consumption. Energy security in Europe and clean energy transition go hand in hand and need to accelerate. Coal regions are at the heart of this, as they have the energy heritage and infrastructure needed for the transition. The job potential in renewables is also higher than in fossil fuels, but everyone, including social partners and civil society, needs to be on board for effective implementation.

Julio Castro highlighted that the biggest challenge in the implementation of the current policy framework was the need to speed up the roll-out of renewables, including the issuing of permits, in the context of an ongoing energy crisis. Juan Alvarez Avello explained Endesa's plans for creating viable alternatives for their workers and local communities and highlighted the challenge of re-industrialisation.

Judith Kirton-Darling referred to the importance of engaging with people who work on the ground and of building the consensus around the 2050 climate neutrality objective with trade unions. The current context makes this very difficult, but a strong social dialogue is needed more than ever, and workers need to be involved in discussions at all levels: EU, national,

regional, and local. Building on that, Ana Marques remarked that all stakeholders of the ecosystem – EU and regional representatives, companies and trade unions – are present in Asturias, and they are engaged in that dialogue.

Anelia Stefanova concluded that the coal regions can be pioneers and examples for other regions and cities. They have the most challenging job to transform their societies into a new model, but the transition will need to happen in other regions as well. More exchange between different regions is needed to increase the speed of change.

## Session 2: Manufacturing & Value chains: coal regions as “manufacturers” of the clean energy transition



The need to re-think how we envisage green, future-proof jobs to strategically position Europe on key-value chains (wind, solar, batteries, H2, etc.) was discussed by the panel. Clean energy value chains have high job creation potential which coal regions should harness to diversify their economies and ensure just transition.

**Discussion led by: Véronique Marx**, Team leader for just transition, DG ENER, European Commission

**Keynote speech: Mariel Diaz**, CEO of Triditive

### Panellists:

- **Pablo Fernández Vila**, General Director of Energy Planning and Natural Resources of Galicia, Spain
- **Judith Kirton-Darling**, Deputy General Secretary, IndustriAll-Europe
- **Naomi Chevillard**, Head of Regulatory Affairs, Solar Power Europe
- **Ignacio (Nacho) Gonzalez Baquet**, Manager Decarbonization Strategy, ArcelorMittal Asturias, Spain

Mariel Diaz, a young local entrepreneur delivered the keynote speech. She underlined the biggest challenges that manufacturers currently face: access to materials, supply chain disruptions, cost of energy, and access to skilled labour and its retention. She highlighted the role additive manufacturing can play in transition through the reduction in energy use as manufactured components are built with less weight, which lowers the overall energy consumption.

Ignacio (Nacho) Gonzalez Baquet stressed the role of large energy consumers, such as ArcelorMittal, in the process of transition and their impact on the local communities. Adoption





Figure 1 Visual recording - Session 1, Part 1



of innovative technologies in steel production (e.g. use of hydrogen) will require (re-) training workers at all levels. Building on that, Judith Kirton-Darling stressed the importance of having the right skills for the long-term transformation of industry. The framework of just transition measures providing support for reskilling of workers is needed to ensure that the workers from declining and transforming industries can retrain for future jobs, such as hydrogen-based steel production.

Naomi Chevillard highlighted that the solar industry is the most job-intensive renewable energy sector where skilled labour could find employment. It is important to remain realistic about this transition, since the gap in skills requirements needs to be addressed first, in particular in digitalisation of the solar industry. Mapping the skills gap would be a first step. There is a need for stronger narratives to create a positive mindset and bring people to universities and training centres. Pablo Fernández Vila added the importance of a stable regulatory framework for the key sectors such as steel, clean energy production, mobility and construction. To fulfil the potential of coal regions to generate energy from renewable sources and create new jobs, public administrations need concrete guidance to ensure the transition.

Workers are often seen as recipients of decisions, but they should be actors in their own future and be closely involved in the process of transition. Examples of two ground-breaking just transition agreements that the Spanish government has signed with mining and thermal power sectors were shared. Finally, a place-based approach to regional just transition planning should go hand in hand with a strong industrial policy to ensure that the just transition is not only about managing the social costs of transition but also delivers new and high-quality jobs.

## Session 3: People & communities: Thriving communities in EU coal regions – a way forward

### RECORDING

In this panel, involving different local communities and levels of government in participatory processes for a just transition in coal regions was discussed.

**Discussion led by: Robert Pollock**, Secretariat of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition

**Keynote speech: Lucía Camporro**, Representative of the Youth Dialogue for Energy Transition

#### Panellists:

- **Enrique Fernández Rodríguez**, Regional Minister for Industry, Labour and Economic Promotion, Spain
- **Alojz Vlcko**, Head of Mayor's Office City of Prievidza, Slovakia
- **Anelia Stefanova**, Energy Transformation Area Leader, CEE Bankwatch Network
- **Begoña María-Tomé**, Just Transition Agreements Coordinator, Just Transition Institute, Spain
- **Lucía Camporro**, Representative of the Youth Dialogue for Energy Transition Event
- **Iztok Mori**, Director of the Municipality of the City of Velenje, Slovenia

The final session was opened by Lucía Camporro who shared discussions with students from the School of Engineering of Mines, Energy and Materials at the University of Oviedo. Her key message was to the importance of bringing young people to the table and making them aware of the energy/climate crisis to achieve their buy-in and avoid brain drain. Social media and short and visually appealing content in easily comprehensible language as the best tools to engage them.

Enrique Fernández Rodríguez stated that an economy should be built around the needs of the individual human beings to ensure that communities become an asset for transition and can build on their sense of identity to create a post-coal future. There needs to be continuous debates and exchanges with the affected community to find a realistic and optimistic solution. Asturias wants to remain an industrial region, however one which has transitioned into a circular economy where raw materials and energy are used sustainably. Alojz Vlcko from the City of Prievidza (Slovakia) and Iztok Mori from Velenje (Slovenia) agreed and underlined the strong identity of coal regions where heritage and traditions need to be





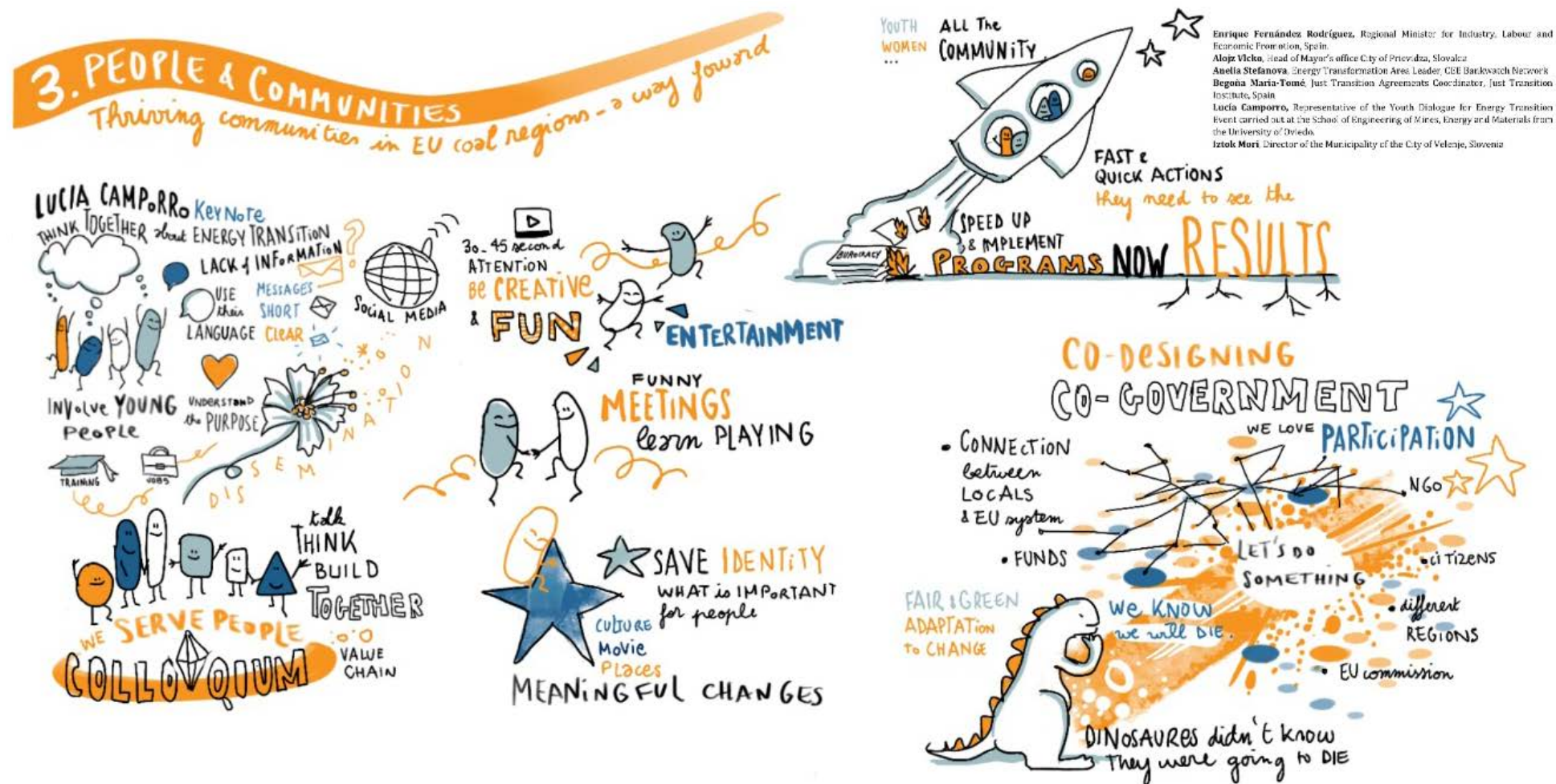


Figure 4 Visual recording - Session 3

safeguarded despite the transition. Provision of information and communication of results is needed for citizens to understand the (need for) transition. In Velenje, forums with the community (including youth, elderly, trade unions and companies) have led to a reimagining of the region – Velenje has committed to becoming climate neutral by 2030 (through the [100 Climate Neutral Cities Mission](#))

To ensure that communities are heard in the political architecture of transition, Begoña María-Tomé from the Spanish Just Transition Institute outlined the approach taken to form the Just Transition Agreements. These were formed by sectorial dialogues and accompanied by citizens' input, leading to 13 agreements for just transition across different Spanish regions. Anelia Stefanova presented Bankwatch's role in the just transition process in seven Central/Eastern European countries. She underlined the need for stronger partnerships in the co-design and co-development of transition policy and the need for funding to reach the local level where knowledge of challenges is greatest. Enrique Fernández Rodríguez added that funding for transition was now available but that the administrative paperwork and bureaucracy were slowing down the process.

Lucía Camporro reinforced the need to include young people in discussions on transition and inform them via social media. Enrique Fernández Rodríguez identified other societal groups who need to be included and to the urgency of transition. Anelia Stefanova said '*We have the power and energy to change the world*' –the older generation needs to make up for mistakes made and needs to provide a better future for the young generation. Begoña María-Tomé noted that in Spain, the collaboration between the different levels of government will continue and that young people will be engaged to a greater extent. Iztok Mori asked for continued support from national governments and the EU.

## Conclusions and closing remarks by the organisers

### RECORDING

**Speaker: Adela Teserova**, Head of Unit, DG ENER, European Commission

On behalf of the European Commission, Adela Teserova thanked the region of Asturias for hosting the Annual Political Dialogue and the organisers for this great opportunity to learn from each other. She acknowledged the role of coal regions in shaping and empowering Europe over the past decades and pointed to the challenges ahead of this industrial revolution. Ms Teserova highlighted the EU's policy framework and unprecedented amount of funding to change how the Member States produce and use energy in the next 8 years. In their reinvention, coal regions were encouraged to continue to work in partnership with local and regional authorities, NGOs, trade unions, youth, etc. and embrace the opportunities that the just transition can bring.

**Speaker: María Belarmina Díaz Aguado**, Director General of Energy, Mining & Repurposing, Government of Asturias

As the final speaker and host of the Annual Political Dialogue, María Belarmina Díaz Aguado underlined that all coal regions are equal and different. Equal in the legacy and pride of having contributed to the prosperity of Europe but different in challenges and socio-economic context. Asturias has dealt with many uncertainties but can now serve as a just transition example for other regions. Funds for just transition are available and given the current challenges, the energy transition needs to be accelerated. More than ever, coal regions need to take the economic opportunities and become entrepreneurs of the future. As at the Annual Political Dialogue, stakeholders need to listen and learn from each other because it is only if Europe works in collaboration that the transition can become a success.

## Initiative for coal regions in transition

The Initiative for coal regions in transition is an initiative by the European Commission.

➔ [ec.europa.eu/coal-regions-in-transition](https://ec.europa.eu/coal-regions-in-transition)

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