

Riga energy efficiency

A?ent?ras un t?s darbinieku misija ir nodro?in?t inov?ciju p?rnesi, veidojot pilotprojektus pa?vald?b? un iedz?vot?ju izgl?to?ana ener??tikas jom?, tiecoties uz ener??tikas sektora dekarboniz?ciju.

In Latvia's capital, Riga, district heating company R?gas siltums is charting new paths in sustainable heating. The Chairman, Ilvars P?tersons, delves into the company's strategic direction amid the evolving energy landscape.

P?tersons and his management team are currently completing a ten-year strategy proposal for the heat energy provider and the final approval is expected by the end of September this year. In this interview, P?tersons gives some insights into the company's future strategy and their perception of the way forward.

"The energy industry is undergoing a monumental transformation that offers numerous opportunities. These extend beyond enhancing our current operations and can lead to the emergence of entirely new sectors. We're at the heart of an immensely important industry, and its potential should never be underestimated," says P?tersons.

Currently, half of the energy produced by R?gas siltums is from renewable sources, and the plan is to increase this to 90% by 2030. The company provides two-thirds of Riga's thermal energy, and it owns approximately 689 kilometres of the city's 800 km wide heating network.

"We're in the process of devising a new decade-long company strategy which we've termed the 'energy exchange platform'. Originally established to generate and distribute heat, we now recognise a broader role we can play. For every megawatt hour produced, our goal is to obtain, rather than release, that energy into the atmosphere. We believe there's always a customer in need of this energy, demanding a more holistic approach from a technological standpoint."

Across Europe, the influx of wind farms and photovoltaic projects has led to fluctuating electricity prices, presenting challenges for network operators. Amid these challenges, the company is currently exploring electricity and has plans to integrate electric boilers.

"Leveraging our central heating system, we can act as mediators, converting excess electricity into heat energy for our customer base. In doing so, we aim to help balance the ever-growing electricity demand," P?tersons says, adding: "In the current unstable energy market our distribution network is really a great asset."

R?gas siltums has access to the only natural underground gas storage facility in Latvia and the Baltics. Historically, there was a strong focus on this, and alongside its heat distribution network, Riga has a well-developed natural gas distribution system.

"However, as we consider the sustainability challenges of natural gas, we're now exploring the production of hydrogen and synthetic methane. This shift offers us the potential to evolve beyond just heating, allowing us to produce methane and integrate it into our existing gas networks. Our goal is to make customer connections greener across the region."

The proposed new strategy focuses on the company's networks and heat production. The plan is to make a clear separation between these functions, so that its networks would remain under regulatory oversight, while opening its production to a more competitive market environment.

"Our long-term vision is to emulate the flexibility seen in the electricity market, allowing for spot pricing, dynamic rates, and more. Ideally, we'd want our customers to have choices, like sourcing heat from various energy retailers or opting for sustainably produced heat. While such a system isn't yet operational in Latvia, our aim is to foster this kind of flexibility for the advantage of our consumers and the wider community," says Petersons.

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