



Industry, Research and Energy committee of the European Parliament backs binding national targets and CO₂ set aside plan



EU countries would have to set themselves binding national energy efficiency targets, and save energy by specific means such as renovating public buildings, under a draft EU directive approved by the Energy Committee on Tuesday February 28. This directive would not only save energy, but also reduce CO₂ emissions, and hence demand for emission allowances under the EU's emissions trading scheme, notes the committee.

Energy efficiency can become a driver of the EU economy by reducing dependence on imports, creating jobs, freeing up financial resources, boosting competitiveness, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The EU has set itself the task of achieving 20% primary energy savings in 2020 (currently a non-binding target), but the Commission estimates that if no measures are taken, the EU will only achieve half of that by 2020.

“This vote is a major sign that Parliament, with a majority including most political parties, takes rising energy costs and energy poverty seriously. Energy efficiency offers possibilities for job creation - notably in the building sector. Now governments have a choice: protect citizens against energy poverty and create many job opportunities or allow big energy companies to make ever-increasing profits” said reporter Claude Turmes (Greens/EFA, LU).

Binding targets

Parliament called for a binding target in a resolution passed in December 2010. Energy Committee MEPs call now for binding national targets - not included in Commission's initial proposal - to be based on specific reference values for each EU country. Achieving these targets will contribute to the overall EU target of 20% energy savings. By June 2013, the Commission will need to check whether Member States are on track to achieve these targets, and by June 2014 it should come forward with a proposal for energy savings targets for 2030, says the text.

ETS set-aside

The text calls on the Commission to report, no later than the date of the entry into force of this directive, on the impact of incentives to invest in low-carbon technologies and the risk of carbon leakage. MEPs also ask the Commission to consider whether to take measures, before the start of the third phase of the EU's emissions trading scheme (ETS), “which may include withholding of the necessary amount of allowances”.

Renovating public buildings

Buildings account for 40% of the EU's energy consumption and 36% of its CO₂ emissions. Under the proposed new measures, Member States would need to start renovating 2.5% of the total floor area of public buildings with a total useable area of more than 250 m² by January 2014, or find alternative ways to achieve equivalent energy savings, such as giving priority to “deep” (i.e. thorough) renovation projects. Energy companies would have to achieve “cumulative annual end-use energy savings equal to at least 1.5% of their energy sales, by volume, averaged over the most recent three-year period”, by helping their final customers to make savings. EU Member States could stipulate that this help must go, as a matter of priority, to households suffering energy poverty. Member States could also find alternative ways to achieve the same energy savings.

Public procurement

Public bodies that purchase or rent products, services, systems and buildings would need to set energy performance requirements as technical specifications, taking into account cost effectiveness based on a whole life-cycle analysis and thus making sure that they buy or rent products with a high energy efficiency performance.

Energy audits

From July 2014, all large enterprises would be required to undergo an energy audit every 4 years, to be carried out by qualified and accredited experts.

Fair bills

EU countries would need to establish a single point of contact to provide advice on energy services and direct consumers to accredited providers for energy services and goods, whilst minimum requirements for billing would need to apply to all Member States. Electricity and gas bills should be based on actual consumption and issued on a monthly basis or every two months in the case of natural gas, says the text.

Promoting efficiency in heating and cooling

Member States would need to put in place “national heating and cooling roadmaps” by January 2015 for developing high-efficiency cogeneration and efficient district heating and cooling networks. These roadmaps should be based on detailed cost-benefit analyses of specific climate conditions, economic feasibility and technical suitability for each region.

Financing facilities

Another idea mooted by MEPs is to establish financing facilities for energy efficiency measures. These facilities would be funded by revenue from fines imposed for failure to comply with the directive and money from cohesion, structural and rural development funds. The report was approved in committee with 51 votes in favour, 6 against and 3 abstentions.

Next steps

The Energy Committee decided (31 votes in favour, 22 against and 5 abstentions) to give the rapporteur a mandate to proceed with the negotiations with the Council. The plenary vote will take place only after the end of these negotiations. According to the earlier published time schedule the final voting will take place in the committee May 8th and in the Parliament later in the summer. **3E**