

Is Winter coming for renewables?

Clean Energy Package: EU still supports fossil fuels for heating and cooling

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In the context of the worldwide paradigm shift in climate change, the EU has a unique opportunity to reposition itself as the world leader in climate action. Despite steps to increase the share of renewables in the heating sector, the Commission proposal does not remove the regulatory loopholes supporting new fossil fuel installations.

The European Commission published today its “Clean Energy Package” which includes legislation that will shape our future energy system. Regrettably, no action has been taken to fix loopholes allowing subsidies to new fossil fuel installations in the heat sector.

“How is the EU planning to reach its 2050 objectives and its COP 21 commitments by keeping endorsing fossil fuels in its energy system?” stated Jean-Marc Jossart, Secretary General of the European Biomass Association (AEBIOM).

The Energy Efficiency Directive (EED) currently does not specify which sources and technologies are eligible to meet its energy efficiency targets. *“The lack of eligibility criteria under the energy efficiency legislation is a missed opportunity to increase transparency of EU legislation and ensure climate change objectives are met. We now urge Member States and the EU Parliament to accelerate the phase-out of even condensing heating oil and coal boilers, and start the phase-down of gas-boilers with a 2050 perspective”*, said Philippe Dumas, Secretary General of the European Geothermal Energy Council (EGEC).

Until now, this loophole has allowed half of the EU Member States to subsidise more efficient fossil fuel heating technology. *“Even if more efficient than the old ones, new oil boilers can continue to burn oil well beyond 2050. And this is not compatible with the EU long-term objectives. Solutions that are not “2050 ready” should not be promoted anymore. Instead, renewable and highly efficient solutions must be phased-in fast. The industry is ready for this but requests clearer goals”* said Thomas Nowak, Secretary General of the European Heat Pump Association (EHPA).

The revised Renewable Energy Directive contains attempts to promote a fuel switch in the heating and cooling sector such as minimum share of renewables in nearly zero energy buildings. *“Member States should endeavour to increase the share of renewables in the heat sector, but this should now be made mandatory”* said Pedro Dias, European Solar Thermal Industry Federation (ESTIF) Secretary General.

However, the general lack of ambition of the package is a missed opportunity to develop different renewable sources of energy, including those capable of decarbonising the heating and cooling sector, such as geothermal, solar thermal, biomass, and efficient heat pumps. Supporting the switch to renewables in the heating sector is an opportunity for the EU not only to effectively combat climate change, but also to decrease its energy imports and develop a truly innovative and competitive industry, creating growth and jobs within the EU.

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