

Economy and consumers set to benefit from sustainable energy

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Opinion

The EU is investing in programmes to develop green technologies, but consumers also have a role to play in combating climate change, writes Jos Delbeke.



In six months' time, world leaders will gather in Paris to conclude a new global climate deal. Sustainable energy will play a pivotal role in putting us on track to avoid dangerous climate change and make the transition to a low-carbon economy.

In early June, the G7 summit held in Germany made headlines as the heads of state of seven of the world's most industrialised countries announced their commitment to the substantial emissions cuts needed to decarbonise the global economy over the course of this century.

This high-level call to action is a welcome development in the run-up to the United Nations climate conference this December, where the world must finalise a new legally binding global climate agreement in order to limit the rise of global average temperatures and prevent the most severe

consequences of climate change.

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The EU is committed to doing its part. Our contribution to the global agreement is a binding target to reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

This was agreed by leaders of the member states last October as part of the 2030 policy framework for climate and energy. It is also a key element of the EU energy union strategy launched in February.

Europe has already made good progress in reducing emissions. We are well on track to meet our 2020 targets for emissions reductions, renewables and energy efficiency.

We have also shown that ambitious climate action is fully compatible with economic growth. Between 1990 and 2013, EU greenhouse gas emissions fell by 19 per cent, while our GDP grew by 45 per cent. Renewable energy technologies have played a part in making this happen.

Without the deployment of renewable energy since 2005, emissions in 2012 could have been seven per cent higher than actual emissions, according to the European environment agency (EEA). The EU's consumption of fossil fuels would also have been about seven per cent higher.

Last year, heads of state and government decided to increase the EU's 20 per cent renewables target by 2020 to at least 27 per cent by 2030. More will have to be done.

Boosting the development of sustainable energy will be essential for achieving the energy union's goal of ensuring secure, affordable and climate-friendly energy for citizens and businesses across Europe.

We still have work to do to become the world number one in renewables - this is one of commission president Jean-Claude Juncker and his team's priorities.

Achieving this goal requires not only getting more of our energy from renewable sources, but also becoming a leader in developing and manufacturing the next generation of renewable energy technologies and making them an integral part of our energy system.

The commission is supporting the development of low-carbon technologies, for example through the NER300 funding programme.

Financed through the sale of emission allowances within the EU emissions trading scheme, the programme is conceived as a catalyst for the demonstration of environmentally safe carbon capture and storage (CCS) and innovative renewable energy technologies on a commercial scale.

So far, 39 renewable projects and Europe's first large-scale carbon capture and storage project have been awarded NER300 funding amounting to €2.1bn. This is expected to leverage a further €2.7bn of private finance.

These projects will bring significant climate benefits. Together with the carbon dioxide stored by the CCS project, the impact will be the equivalent of taking more than three million cars off the EU roads.

The NER300 programme will be renewed under the 2030 climate and energy framework and extended to low-carbon innovation in the industrial sector.

Climate action is also an important area in the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. The EU has committed to investing at least 35 per cent of the programme's nearly €80bn budget in climate-related action.

Moreover, EU funding contributes to the transfer of technology outside Europe's borders by financing and investing in climate action and development projects with a technology dimension, as well as through research collaboration.

In the run-up to the Paris conference and beyond, global efforts to accelerate the low-carbon transition are more needed than ever. All parts of society have a role to play.

This year's sustainable energy week makes a valuable contribution to the discussion by focusing on the role of consumers, shedding light on what every one of us can do in our daily lives.

We all stand to benefit if we can prevent climate change from reaching dangerous levels. Let's take action together for more sustainable energy and a cleaner, safer future for our planet and future generations.

About the author

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[Energy](#) [4]

[Environment](#) [5]

[European Commission](#) [6]

Categories

[Energy](#) [7]

[Environment](#) [8]



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- [2] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/jobs-opportunities-and-costs-key-eus-sustainable-energy-strategy>
- [3] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/co2-emissions-trading-overhaul-will-drive-eu-towards-low-carbon-economy>
- [4] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/energy>
- [5] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/environment>

[6] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/european-commission>

[7] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/energy>

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