

Energy efficiency: EU needs to 'think bigger'

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Feature

The Commission is set to revise the energy efficiency directive later this year. How are MEPs looking to influence this key update?



The European Commission intends to publish proposals to revise sections of the energy efficiency directive later this year. Before then, the Parliament will publish an own initiative report to provide input. Which direction is the report likely to suggest and how will it address the EU's climate change ambitions expressed at last year's COP21 conference in Paris?

Hungarian Green/EFA MEP Benedek Jávor thinks that the Parliament must take the report as an opportunity to deliver a strong signal to the Commission on which direction to take.

He believes that there is no reason to be negative at this point; "The key message should be that the energy efficiency directive provides an excellent framework for energy saving. Even at this early stage of its implementation it is already beginning to deliver results."

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However, he points out that - according to the Commission's own 'State of the Energy Union' report - member states are projected to reach only 17.6 per cent primary energy savings by 2020. Therefore, any planned revisions should not remove the need to pursue full implementation of the existing legislation.

The Hungarian deputy also believes that the Paris COP21 agreement means that the EU needs to 'think bigger' when undertaking the revision.

"We need to have a higher level of ambition - the post-2020 EU energy efficiency target should be aligned with both COP21 and the position adopted by the European Parliament in its 2013 resolution."

He believes that, "40 per cent should be the bare minimum target. This should be binding and implemented through individual national targets."

The current directive emphasises flexibility in implementation. It is a good idea in principle; however - as Danish ALDE MEP Morten Helveg Petersen points out - it has led to a situation where, to date, only 16 member states have taken measures towards delivering end-use energy savings according to the directive.

Furthermore, seven member states have not even established energy audits. Petersen says; "The EU will never reach its energy efficiency goals with only 16 of 28 member states on board."

As ALDE shadow rapporteur, he is focusing on, "sharpening the binding targets for member states on energy efficiency. Energy savings, energy security and climate targets are all complementary to this."

He feels strongly that the EU need to, "continue to be a frontrunner on energy and climate policies; flexibility without stressing binding targets can lead to loopholes."

He agrees with Jávör that events at COP21 in Paris have fundamentally changed expectations; "The Paris agreement and its new targets also make the case for a revision of the directive. I hope that the report will be able to influence the upcoming revision of the directive, motivating member states to reach both our 2020 energy goals and the targets from Paris."

Like his colleagues, he wants to strive for an ambitious outcome for the revision. While the report will cover a number of elements, there appears to be clear consensus in two areas. Firstly, that while the existing directive has been positive, the flexibility in implementation has created shortfalls that need to be addressed.

Perhaps more significantly, COP21 has brought a new perspective; if the EU is to maintain its position as leaders on the fight against climate change, they need to up their ambition and make it stick. Jávör and Petersen have support.

Czech S&D member Miroslav Poche believes that the revision of this directive will be one of the key

energy issues of this year. He also believes that it presents the opportunity to turn 2016 into a breakthrough year for energy efficiency. For this reason, it is important that the coming report sets the right tone.

"Energy efficiency," he says, "is the most important source of energy. Energy that is not used is, by definition, the cleanest, the most secure and the most affordable. This fact has been reiterated numerous times by the International Energy Agency in their World Energy Outlook.

The Czech deputy agrees with Poche and his Hungarian colleague that - although the existing directive is undoubtedly delivering a number of benefits - it is still currently underachieving. "There remain a number of shortcomings that need to be addressed", he stressed.

He also concurs on the issue of the post 2020 targets; "Bearing in mind the outcomes of COP 21, I am convinced that it will be important to revise the 27 per cent target for energy efficiency for 2030 agreed by the European Council in 2014. Furthermore, I believe that any new targets need to be binding, not indicative"

Using binding targets, he says, will lead to improvements in energy efficiency that will cut costs for business and households. From a business perspective, this will make Europe more competitive.

Equally importantly, it helps address the widespread problem of energy poverty. Poche believes that this should be a key priority, "as almost 25 per cent of EU citizens are either unable, or at risk of not being able, to pay their energy bills."

Energy saving via increased could be a major part of the solution.

About the author

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