

EU Parliament support for energy efficiency target 'vital', says campaign group

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Opinion

This Thursday MEPs will have to decide whether they are for or against a 40 per cent by 2030 energy efficiency target. It's a crucial vote and far more than just a debate on numbers, writes Friends of the Earth's Brook Riley.



MEPs will vote on Thursday 23rd June on a 40 per cent energy efficiency target by 2030 | Photo credit: Fotolia

The international energy agency calculates efficiency improvements have avoided over €5 trillion in fuel and infrastructure costs over the past 25 years. That makes efficiency the world's 'first fuel', according to the agency, and the 'most important arrow in the quiver' in the fight against climate change.

This also makes it a contentious issue in the European Parliament. MEPs have backed an energy

efficiency target of 40 per cent by 2030 for more than two years; ever since the 2030 climate and energy objectives have been debated. But each time it's been a close vote, with the Liberals, Socialists and Greens narrowly beating the centre right.

The progressives cite European Commission analysis showing that the higher the 2030 target, the better the results for jobs, the economy, energy security and the climate.

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However, the impressive benefits also mean efficiency is the nemesis for a fossil fuel-based economy. €5 trillion on infrastructure cost savings means €5 trillion not spent on coal and gas plants, on pipelines, on LNG terminals and tankers. There is a lot at stake.

MEPs are voting on Thursday because of Markus Pieper, a German EPP group deputy. Pieper is a longstanding opponent of energy efficiency. His latest attempt - the subject of the vote - is an 'own initiative' report which he hoped would brand efficiency policies as costly and burdensome.

But Pieper failed to win over a majority of MEPs in the industry and energy committee. He is now trying to dilute his own report in plenary by marshalling the centre-right to vote against the 40 per cent target.

It's rather pathetic, but dangerous too. The EPP is the biggest group in the Parliament. Many of its members will back Pieper out of party loyalty. For the 40 per cent target to go through, it is vital that enough deputies put efficiency first. If economic and energy security arguments are not sufficient to win them over, here are two additional reasons to consider:

First, the EU signed up to far more ambitious climate action commitments at the Paris summit last December. Countries previously needed to limit global temperature increases to no more than 2°C. Now they need to aim for 1.5°C. It's a huge difference. And a strong push on energy efficiency could cut EU emissions in half by 2030.

Second, Europe is going through hard times. Big new initiatives are needed to demonstrate the EU's added value and to help those who need it the most. As British S&D MEP Theresa Griffin has forcefully pointed out, "for every one per cent increase in energy efficiency, three million more homes can be properly renovated and seven million people lifted out of energy poverty."

To their great credit, a majority of MEPs have consistently backed a 40 per cent energy savings target. However, it is essential that they do so again on Thursday.

About the author

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