

Sustainable Energy: Speeding up the energy transition

Written by José Blanco López MEP on 14 June 2017 in Opinion
Opinion

The US pulling out of the Paris agreement has demonstrated that the EU can, and should, take a leading role on climate issues, argues José Blanco López.



Renewable Energy directive shows that the EU is committed to meeting its climate change goals | *Photo credit: Adobe Stock*

Eighteen months ago, the world took a step forward in its battle against climate change. The Paris deal isn't just an agreement on a common goal for almost 200 countries. It also brought together the biggest global emitters of greenhouse gases – China, the United States and India – through contributions determined at a national level, in other words voluntarily undertaken by the parties.

Regrettably, Donald Trump has decided to withdraw the US from this agreement. He has never hidden his lack of belief in environmental issues, and implicitly had already abandoned the agreement by dismantling all of the steps taken by the Obama administration to boost renewable energies and fulfil the commitments made at COP21.

Fortunately, Trump's rejection has not prevented the ratification of the strong commitment by Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the European institutions, with rapid implementation of the agreement.

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This is the role that Europe has to play. If we have managed to highlight anything, it is that we can serve as an example for the rest of the world when it comes to the fight against climate change. Decarbonising our economy is not a pipe dream, it is an opportunity for the future.

Specifically, Parliament and Council are currently debating the proposals on clean energy presented by the Commission at the end of November. These are measures that aim to shape the European energy system for the coming decade and should result in the EU leading the energy transition by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030.

Among these, the new directive on renewable energies, through which Europe is aspiring to regain its lead and benefit from clean, safe energy, which in turn contributes to increasing energy independence, plays a key role. However, the aim of 27 per cent proposed by the Commission is insufficient for a journey towards total decarbonisation by the middle of the century.

As Parliament's rapporteur on the proposed renewables directive, I have proposed that the quota for renewable energies be increased to 35 per cent by 2030, among other changes. The challenge of limiting the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C, set out in the Paris agreement, requires considerable additional efforts. Also, the goal proposed by the Commission does not differ significantly from the base scenario, and we have to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by the reduction of the costs of more developed technologies for the production of renewable energy.

But there is no point setting a goal if it is not linked to those who have to achieve this goal. The current directive shows that the Union is committed to meeting the goals set out for 2020 because it includes binding objectives for each member state.

I am therefore also proposing that we re-establish the binding national objectives for 2030. This measure provides the security, confidence and the planning needed to incentivise investment.

In terms of incentivising investment, we also need to prevent any retroactive measure in the regulation.

My proposal is therefore to attempt to strengthen the provisions introduced by the Commission to remove any loopholes for what could result in retroactive regulatory changes, as has happened in the past. For example, it establishes the right to receive sufficient compensation for changes such as

those suffered under renewable remuneration schemes.

It is also necessary to promote the self-consumption of renewable energies and, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to prevent self-consumers from being discriminated against or facing disproportionate procedures or charges. In order to avoid this, my proposal states that the member states should not levy taxes or duties of any kind on self-consumed energy, provided that the energy produced remains off-grid.

These are just some of the measures which can be put in place to make the agreements reached in Paris a reality. These are possible and achievable agreements, even without the assistance of countries as powerful as the US. If the announcement by Trump that he was withdrawing from the Paris agreement has done anything, it has confirmed the global consensus, including in the US, regarding the need to preserve and strengthen this deal.

We can't afford not to comply with the Paris agreement, not from an environmental perspective, as reports such as those from the intergovernmental panel on climate change show, nor from an economic perspective - we would miss out on the opportunity to generate growth and employment in areas of activity requiring high levels of qualification.

Now is not the time to build walls, it is the time to break down barriers and open the doors to energy transition. Time is running out.

About the author

José Blanco López (S&D, ES) is Parliament's rapporteur on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources

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