

## Clean Energy: Facing the reality of climate change

Written by Patrizia Toia on 13 September 2017 in Opinion  
Opinion

Policymakers must be bold enough to allow the EU's renewable energy sector to grow and become globally competitive, writes Patrizia Toia.



Patrizia Toia | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

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There used to be a time, in the recent past, when discussing the transition towards a clean energy economy in Parliament's industry, research and energy committee meant facing the demands of industries preoccupied with the extra costs of environmental targets.

Some people still doubted the human causes of climate change, and even the existence of climate change itself. Targets, forecasts and measures were directed to a far-away, indefinite future.

Well, after this past summer, those times are well and truly over - at least for the majority of members of the European Parliament.

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That far-away, indefinite future of climate change and cheap renewable resources is now our present. Today, the main demand from industry is for policymakers to be bold enough to allow the growing renewable industry sector to remain competitive globally. The transition towards clean energy is accelerating beyond the more optimistic forecast.

It's up to European legislators and the EU institutions to react quickly enough to maintain our competitive edge and prevent the worst scenarios of climate change to happen.

Thanks to the commitment of the European Parliament and the EU, we managed to set ambitious targets for clean energy and, at the diplomatic level, managed to get the 2015 Paris agreement to include a commitment to limit "the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2° C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change."

US President Donald Trump announced that his country will not respect the agreement, denying climate change, but this simply further highlighted the inevitability of change. American industries are protesting because they do not want to become the dinosaurs of the global economy.

A few weeks ago, Texas was hit by its worst hurricane in decades, with flooding killing over 50 people and displacing more than 30,000.

Meanwhile, flooding across India, Nepal and Bangladesh has killed almost 1200 people. The tragic consequences of climate change are not just forecasts from a pessimistic report - they are the harrowing reality we must face.

At the same time, the global economy's race toward clean energy has accelerated, and as a consequence, the European Union has lost its leadership on solar panels.

At the end of August the new figures published by solar industry firm Asia Europe Clean Energy (Solar) Advisory revealed that China has exceeded its 2020 target of 105GW of installed solar capacity, after new builds in June and July pushed it up beyond 112GW.

In the first half of 2017, China increased its total solar capacity by 24.4GW, dwarfing similar efforts in Europe, and cementing China's status as the world's leading solar nation. According to Chinese authorities' plans, total new capacity for this year could reach 45GW.

Renewable energy groups have called on Europe to be more like China and strive to be number one in the sector. SolarPower Europe has urged the EU to increase the current 27 per cent renewable energy target for 2030 to 35 per cent. What is certain is that we must urgently apply the plans set out by the Commission's 'Clean energy for all Europeans' package, which was presented last November.

We are doing our best to get results and we will continue to work to fight climate change through effective legislation, investments and a holistic approach aiming at supporting European competitiveness and protecting the environment.

## About the author

Patrizia Toia (S&D, IT) is a Vice-Chair of Parliament's industry, research and energy committee

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