

EU needs 'paradigm shift' in climate policy to reach Paris agreement goals

Written by Martin Banks on 2 March 2018 in News
News

A wide-ranging new study published on Wednesday by the Öko Institut Berlin has outlined how the EU should revise its climate commitments.



Polar bear cubs | Photo credit: Press Association

Its publication comes with the IPCC due to publish a report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C in the autumn, with COP24 following in December.

Speaking at the publication in Parliament, study author Felix Matthes said the Paris agreement and its target to limit global warming to well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial temperature levels will require a “paradigm shift” for climate and energy policy strategies.

To stay within the set limits, the report says the EU needs to cut the recent emissions levels to almost

zero by 2050 and “start quickly with significant emission reductions within the next decade.”

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All sectors must contribute, it says, but the sectors with the most significant shares in the total emissions - the power sector, transport and buildings - need to contribute the most.

A 55 per cent emission reduction, a share of about 40 per cent renewables and an improvement of energy efficiency of approximately 45 per cent for 2030 would allow a “continuous and non-disruptive emission reduction pathway.”

Matthes said, “This is the year in which EU member states will have to revise their climate commitments. Our report shows them what is required.”

Addressing reporters at a briefing, he said, “The transformation of the EU to a fully decarbonised economy will need clear targets, robust strategies but also significant flexibility in an ongoing learning-by-doing process.”

The study is said to be the first comprehensive scenario analysis of its kind for the European Union.

It says that keeping the increase of global mean temperature below 2°C and the EU achieving a corresponding 95 per cent greenhouse gas emission reduction will require consistent short- and medium-term targets.

Matthes said, “A transition of the energy system as outlined in the Vision Scenario could also decrease significantly the imports of fossil and nuclear fuels and the overall dependence on imports.

“In the transition outlined in the study, energy imports will already lie well below recent levels in 2020 and significantly decrease in the subsequent decades.”

The report says, “A key prerequisite for the decarbonisation of the transport sectors are the early uptake of electric mobility in the coming decade and major efficiency improvements for all vehicle fleets.

“A wide range of other measures is necessary to achieve greenhouse gas emission reductions of 90 per cent and above. Industrial processes, waste management, and agriculture must be subject to significant emission reduction efforts.

“Significant energy efficiency improvements must be achieved in all sectors in the coming decades.”

Greens MEP Claude Turmes told reporters he was dismayed by the absence of any significant reference to climate action at last Friday’s EU summit, which discussed the next long-term EU budget, known as the MMF.

He said, "I was told the climate commissioner had to fight tooth and nail just to get a half sentence into the final statement. This was a disaster particularly given the fact that parliament demanding 30 per cent of climate expenditure in the post-2020 budget."

His Dutch colleague, Bas Eickhout, said the group, which commissioned the study, welcomed the findings.

He said, "This is the action that will be needed if the EU and international community is going to keep global warming below two degrees."

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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