The EU transport sector continues to rely heavily on oil. But a viable alternative already exists and needs to be supported.

Brussels, 07 July 2020 – Bioenergy Europe, in collaboration with the European Renewable Ethanol Association (ePURE), is pleased to announce the launch of the third chapter of its Statistical Report 2020 focusing on biofuels for transport.

Biofuels represent 89% of all renewable energy sources in transport and its role in the decarbonisation of the transport sector in the EU will be pivotal in the coming years. And yet, the report reveals that in absolute terms, the oil in transport still accounts for 92% of final consumption. More worrying still, the report reveals that after several promising years of decreased oil consumption (2007 – 2013), the share of oil has once again begun a steady increase, growing by almost 6.6% between 2013-2018. This raises the question; How credible can the EU’s path to decarbonization be if it fails to tackle one of the most polluting sectors?

The share of biofuels in transport has also increased in the last decade. The production of biofuels within the EU28 grew at an average rate of 3.5% between 2017 and 2018 with biodiesel being the main driver. Biofuels potential is evident, but the numbers do not lie. Renewables solutions are not sufficiently supported today. If we look further and analyze the consumption of advanced biofuels such as waste and residue-based biofuels, we are far from achieving the target of 3.5% by 2030 as set by the REDII.

The advantages of biofuels are manifold, including the easy integration to the existing technology and infrastructure, allowing for considerable savings of processing, manufacturing costs and energy. Moreover, biofuels foster the circular economy particularly through the use of waste and residues such as animal fats and used cooking oil (almost 30% of the feedstock) for biodiesel production. Innovative biorefineries successfully process European agricultural feedstock (crops, wastes, residues) into renewable fuel, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the need for imported feedstocks.

Political will, coherence and consistency are therefore a sine qua non condition to make a real leap forward in the decarbonisation of the transport sector. All sustainable renewable low-carbon fuels should be able to contribute towards EU climate and renewable objectives under REDII sustainability criteria. Financing renewables in transport is therefore key to achieve the objectives. To date, advanced waste and residues based advanced biofuels - estimated to potentially save up to 90% of greenhouse gas emissions - were excluded from the list of sustainable fuels elaborated by Technical Expert Group in the context of the taxonomy regulation.

How can transport be decarbonised? One solution could be to promote the uptake of renewables in transport through an effective carbon pricing policy, in particular through an Energy Taxation Directive that focuses on carbon intensity instead of volume. And yet, it takes two to tango. A coherent policy framework should be accompanied by measures that promote investors’ confidence. By giving the industry the right tools to operate, biofuels’ potential can be progressively exploited, reaching its expected role in the decarbonisation of the EU.

Emmanuel Desplechin, Secretary General of ePURE, “As these new figures show, renewable EU ethanol is already making a positive impact in the climate fight – reducing emissions from the petrol cars that will remain predominant on Europe’s roads for years to come without the need for new infrastructure. As policymakers look at how to achieve the transport decarbonisation goals of the EU Green Deal, they should unleash the full potential of European renewable ethanol”.

Jean-Marc Jossart, Secretary General of Bioenergy Europe: “The Biofuels sector has the real potential to transform EU’s transport sector in a sustainable and green system. As too often we have seen in the past, political will lack of ambition when it comes to implement the necessary strategies. We need more and sooner”.

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