REPowerEU’s neglect of the bioenergy sector could put EU energy targets at risk

Brussels, 18 May 2022 – Bioenergy Europe welcomes the long-awaited REPowerEU plan by the European Commission to phase-out the fossil fuel dependence on Russia. However, we regret to see that the plan still lacks the needed vision to recognise sustainable bioenergy as one of the key solutions to increase EU energy security.

Today’s plan only refers to bioenergy in one paragraph, acknowledging the sector’s contribution in the renewable energy mix (covering almost 60% of the total) and foreseeing a moderate but steady increase of the sector until 2030. The plan lacks a proposal of any concrete measures or target accompanying the statement which shows a lack of vision by the European Commission to pave the way for concrete and readily available solutions like solid biomass. Considering the current geopolitical context this is simply unacceptable.

“With the Commission failing to consider bioenergy properly, we are missing a huge opportunity to ensure energy security and supply European citizens with renewable heat at an affordable cost in the next season,” says Jean-Marc Jossart, Secretary-General of Bioenergy Europe. “Russian fossil fuel imports are being replaced with other fossil imports and only create new dependencies which is simply moving the problem instead of solving it.”

It is indeed essential to provide modern and renewable heating solutions for households. European citizens need alternatives for independent and affordable energy supply options. An ambitious plan is required to replace old and inefficient heating systems with modern ones that efficiently provide sustainable bioheat to homes while improving air quality.

Diversifying the energy supply in the EU will be key to ensuring true independence from Russian fossil fuel imports. With the plan focusing on the fast deployment of renewable energy sources, all types of bioenergy solutions play and will play an important part to secure the supply of clean energy through space heating in buildings, grid stabilisation, ramp-up of renewable power production, decarbonisation of hard-to-abate industries and the deployment of new needed technologies like Bioenergy with Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS).

The bioenergy industry is highly diversified and therefore, a more holistic approach towards the sector is needed. Hence, considering only biomethane in the plan represents just one fraction of the vast array of supply and potential of this sector which is supplied with feedstock from forests, agriculture, and the residues and waste management from several industries. The affordability of bioenergy as a solution compared to other proposed solutions is not sufficiently laid out in the presented plan. Transparency on the true costs and CO₂ savings of each option is required to assess short-term and long-term impacts.

During the past few months, bioenergy has only become more competitive, and it will continue to grow in Europe in all sectors of society: power production, industry, transport, agriculture, and heating. On top of this, there is unlocked potential of underutilised biomass. Residues (e.g. from road side management, parks, forest management etc.) should be cost-effectively utilised to produce renewable energy instead of being left to rot on the ground, or burned in uncontrolled open field fires.

“If Europe is serious about reaching higher renewable targets, it must put in place a clear strategy with ambitious, yet reachable objectives for each sector,” states Irene di Padua, Policy Director of the association. “In this context, the idea of limiting the support or even the use of primary woody biomass will only hinder our local renewable industry without guaranteeing further sustainability and biodiversity protection.”
Notes to editors:

- Bioenergy Europe is the voice of the European bioenergy industry. It aims to develop a sustainable bioenergy market based on fair business conditions. Founded in 1990, Bioenergy Europe is a non-profit, Brussels-based international organisation bringing together more than 41 associations and 143 companies, as well as academia and research institutes from across Europe.