Keep the heat in! New Commission must decarbonise Europe’s heating system first

Brussels, 17 September 2019 - Ursula von der Leyen’s climate agenda is ambitious and challenging. She is to stand the pressure of tackling a global climate crisis that gets worse by the day and that requires a political leadership ready to do everything in its power to slow the damage down. In her political guidelines, she outlines plans for a just transition for all, and it all makes sense: Europe shall become a world-leader in circular economy, measures must be taken to encourage green financing, ecosystems must be protected and pollution must be dialled down to as low as zero.

As for slashing emissions, her conviction that more ambitious targets for 2030 are needed is reassuring, as she committed to increase the EU target for 2030 towards 55%. The commitment behind such ambition raises questions of equally astounding magnitude: how will she get there? Industries seem to be a priority of her guidelines, as she plans a new industrial strategy, highlights Europe’s steely traits of a prominent industrial economy and emphasizes the importance of decarbonising energy-intensive industries.

However, it is within the residential sector that the greatest potential for decarbonisation lies. Heating, dauntingly dominated by fossil fuels (shy of 80%), is the largest slice of Europe’s annual energy bill, and space heating is responsible for 53% of such bill. Renewable technologies are not contributing enough, but among these, biomass is the undisputed leader with an 87% share. At EU scale, biomass accounted for 20% of the overall residential heating consumption in 2017.

Make no mistake: industrial heating processes, with a 32% share in the bill, are in dire need for decarbonisation, and further R&D is indeed needed when it comes to high-heat industrial needs, for instance. Among other benefits bioenergy, due to its competitiveness and technical characteristics such as non-intermittency and high-temperature levels, can be a tailored-fit solution to such needs.

Within its six wishes for the new president-elect, leading renewable energy trade association Bioenergy Europe has recently stressed the importance of tackling the issues of Europe’s dirty heating sector. Among other measures, industry stakeholders call for a political leadership that will resolutely accelerate the replacement of old, polluting heating technologies with modern, highly efficient renewable ones.

In order to better understand our heating system, Bioenergy Europe launches today its 2019 Report on Bioheat, diving into these and more issues, providing the reader with data on renewable heat and the different energy sources in EU28, the types of biomass used for bioheat in 2018, which sectors contribute the most to our heat consumption, et cetera. Most figures are filtered by country, helping policy makers and investors to better calibrate their decision-making.

For those who don’t have time to dive into detailed figures, a short policy brief has also been made available. The two-pager includes highlights and a selection of graphs, providing an overview of the current dynamics of our heating system at a glance.

ANNEX

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