EU strategy on heating and cooling

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The European Parliament adopted by 550 votes to 66 with 87 abstentions, a resolution on heating and cooling following the Commission communication entitled ‘An EU Strategy on Heating and Cooling’.

Members fully endorsed the Commission’s ambition of **recognising and exploiting the synergies between the electricity and heating sectors**, and called on the latter to consider heating and cooling sectors as part of European energy market design.

Recalling that almost 50 % of the EU's final energy demand is used for heating and cooling, parliament pointed out the necessity to **take along specific measures** for heating and cooling when revising the Energy Efficiency Directive (2012/27/EU), the Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) and the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2010/31/EU).

Specific sustainable strategies: Parliament called for **specific sustainable heating and cooling strategies** to be developed at national level, giving special attention to combined heat and power, cogeneration, district heating and cooling, preferably based on **renewables**. It stressed the need to facilitate decentralised energy generation, thereby empowering consumers to be more involved in the energy market, and to control their own energy use.

District energy networks: stressing the importance of district energy networks that offer an alternative to more polluting systems for individual heating, Parliament encouraged the Member States to put in place fiscal and financial mechanisms to encourage the development and use of district heating and cooling, and to tackle regulatory barriers.

Technology: Members stressed the fundamental role of renewable energy technologies, including the use of sustainable biomass, of aero thermal, geothermal and solar energy, and of photovoltaic cells in combination with electric batteries, to heat water and provide heating and cooling in buildings, in conjunction with thermal storage facilities that can be used for daily or seasonal balancing. They called on Member States to provide **incentives** for the promotion and take-up of such technologies.

Members called for a review of existing legislation focused on safeguarding **technology neutrality** and cost efficiency so as to ensure that it does not promote or discredit one technology over another – renewable energy produced on-site, such as by means of residential solar panels, or near a building should, for instance, be accounted for when calculating the building’s energy performance, regardless of the source.

Modernise heating systems and renovate buildings: energy demand in the building sector is responsible for about **40 %** of energy consumption in the EU, and a third of the natural gas use. This could be reduced by up to three quarters if the renovation of buildings is speeded up. Furthermore, **85 %** of this energy consumption is used for heating and domestic hot water.

Parliament recommended:

- the continuation of increasing **energy efficiency standards for buildings**, taking account of and encouraging technical innovation, particularly as regards ensuring homogeneity of insulation;
- continued support for the **construction of nearly zero energy buildings;**
- the provision of adequate **co-financing** for initiatives aimed at renovating public housing and apartment blocks with low levels of energy efficiency;

- set up an **attractive financing system** to promote new technologies for heating households using renewable energy sources.

Outdated solid-fuel furnaces: the resolution asked Member States to use legal and economic means to **accelerate the gradual phasing-out of outdated solid-fuel furnaces** with an energy efficiency level of less than 80 %, and to replace them, where possible, with efficient, sustainable heating systems at local level (such as district heating systems) or micro level (such as geothermal and solar systems).

Member States were called upon to:

- phase out the use in urban areas of outdated furnaces for heating purposes that generate 'low height' emissions;
- take measures to phase out energy-inefficient furnaces and boilers using heating oil and coal that currently fuel over half of the building stock in the countryside;
- as a matter of urgency, take steps towards phasing out low-temperature furnaces used for the combustion of solid fossil fuels and organic waste, which, during the combustion process, release into the atmosphere a variety of harmful substances.

Europe's temperate climate zone: in this zone, reverse systems for heating and cooling using efficient **heat pumps** could become very important under certain conditions, given their flexibility. Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to provide, with regard to heat pumps, **adequate aligned calculation methods**, and to promote the sharing of best practices for support mechanisms in order to support efficient, sustainable and low-carbon solutions to various thermal needs.

Biogas: stressing that biogas represents an important sustainable source for heating and cooling systems, Parliament suggested setting up a clear target for organic recycling in order to incentivise investments in the collection and treatment of bio-waste.

Research: Members took the view that progress should be made under the Horizon 2020 framework programme in R&D **relating to sustainable and efficient heating and cooling systems and materials,** such as:

- small-scale renewable generation and storage solutions, district heating and cooling systems;
- insulation materials, as well as innovative materials such as **structural window glass** that lets in high levels of short-wave radiation (sunlight) from outside and lets out only a minimum of the long-wave thermal radiation that would otherwise escape to the outside.

Energy poverty: Parliament urged the Commission and the Member States to come up with **specific strategies** to tackle the ever-growing problem of energy poverty in order to help all consumers, especially the most vulnerable, to ameliorate their housing, heating and cooling conditions, on an individual or collective basis, whether they are home owners or tenants.