Renewable sources for energy: Community strategy. Green paper

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OBJECTIVE: This green paper is intended to prompt a debate on the best approach to follow and the measures needed to improve the penetration of renewable energy sources (wind, solar energy, biomass, hydro-electricity, etc.) onto the EU energy market. SUBSTANCE: In its green paper, the Commission seeks to promote renewable energy sources whose potential is far from being fully exploited (their current contribution to the EU's overall energy consumption is under 6%) and which should play a much more important role in future for economic, ecological and strategic reasons. The green paper describes the current situation and the advantages of increasing the use of renewable in the light of Community objectives and sets out the basic elements of a policy strategy to be implemented at both Community and Member State levels. This strategy should, in the Commission's view, comprise four separate elements: (1) in the first place, the goal across the Community must be to achieve a clear, ambitious and yet realistic increase in the contribution of renewables to the Community energy balance. If we were to double the present contribution to 12% by 2010, for example, this would focus the minds of decision-makers at all levels; (2) Member State cooperation on renewables must be boosted, if necessary by creating a mechanism for coordinating efforts at Community level; (3) the Community should reinforce its policies affecting the development of renewable sources of energy by making better of use of the opportunities presented by the provisions of the Treaty (particularly those on the internal markets). The main obstacles are linked to the imperfections of the market (technical and non-technical barriers) and the fact that the prices of conventional fuels do not reflect all the environmental costs they incur. Tax incentives and the taxing of conventional energy (CO2 tax) can also be effective instruments for promoting renewables; (4) efforts must be made to ensure more rigorous assessment and monitoring of the progress towards achieving the objectives for the penetration of renewables (by improving the quality of statistics and setting up a database with the capacity to record all the Community aid allocated to renewables). The Commission points out that its green paper merely defines the context without putting forward specific proposals. On the basis of the conclusions the Commission will draw from the debate, a more detailed Community strategy and an action plan will be published by mid 1997.