The share of renewable energy sources in the European Union: proposals for concrete actions

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The Council adopted conclusions in which it endorses the Commission's assessment of the development of the contribution of renewable energy sources to sustainable energy supply in the EU.

The main issues dealt with concern the following :

1) Institutional, administrative and technical barriers : with a view to contributing to a well-functioning market, allowing for the successful development of renewable energy, due attention should be paid by Member States to various pre-conditions, such as reducing planning and licensing red tape, facilitating

grid access, the set-up of the technical system, preserving network stability notably in case of large injection of intermittent renewable electricity, providing sufficient network capacity and cross-border interconnection, and to the provision of guarantee of origin. It requires also appropriate policy framework conditions and incentives for targeted and efficient support to contribute to the security of investment. The specific technical competence of the system operators as well as the adequate provision of the ancillary services (e.g. balancing) are equally important. The importance of local factors has to be recognised. Lastly, the development of heating and cooling from renewable sources needs further attention and would benefit from assessing its potential and identifying specific barriers. As a first step, the Commission, in collaboration with the Member States, is invited to carry out this assessment of both the potential and the barriers;

2) European Biomass Energy Action Plan : the Council welcomes the idea of an action plan which should be based on scientific data and commercial experiences. It should include analysis of potentials and how biomass can be utilised in a cost-effective and sustainable way. The findings should be collected and compiled by the Commission and made available to the Member States. The plan

should deal with the use of biomass in the three areas electricity, heating/cooling and transport, taking into account potential conflicts and synergies that may arise from the use of biomass for different purposes;

3) Renewable energy conference : it could be beneficial for EU policy-makers in the field of renewable energy to avail themselves of an informal conference for the development of renewable energy policy, comparable to the Florence and Madrid fora whose decisive contribution to the functioning of the electricity and gas internal market is widely acknowledged. The Council would support initiatives leading to the establishment of such a conference comprising all relevant stakeholders, to address both the implementation of the Renewables Directive and the broader administrative and technical issues as well as the operation of the market in relation to the promotion of renewable energy;

4) Sources of renewable energy with high potential such as wind offshore energy : in order for several sources with a high technical and economical potential to make a significant contribution to meeting the EU-targets on renewable energy there is a need for enhanced co-operation and planning between European network operators, the competent authorities and, where appropriate, the European Commission notably on electricity grid integration issues, for joint R&D efforts focussing on further cost reductions of supporting technologies and for an improved exchange of information on the environmental implications of these technologies. Efforts should be made not only in developing these sources but also in removing the barriers that prevent their penetration of the market. Taking into account the large potential of wind energy, and notably offshore wind energy in the EU, the statements and recommendations of the recent

EU Policy Workshop Development of Offshore Wind Energy in Egmond, the Netherlands, are worth noting. These recommendations refer to specific actions on market development, environment, grid integration and follow-up, which according to the recommendations should be undertaken by the European Commission, Member States and essential stakeholders. In this respect, the Danish offer to organise a follow-up seminar in 2005 is welcomed;

5) Community financial instruments : while the role of the private sector and market-based instruments in the development of renewable energy should be duly acknowledged, renewable energy should be

given adequate priority in Community funding, making sure that added value is achieved at Community level. To the extent possible consistency should be ensured between national programmes and these instruments while leaving national actors decide on the most appropriate projects. It is also important that Member States learn from each others good practices concerning financing and other incentives.

In this context, due attention should be given to the need to address the gap between the demonstration and market phases of renewable technologies;

6) Actions in third countries : the EU should continue to defend its global leading role with progressive policies and measures, use its influence to prioritise and further strengthen an efficient renewable energy deployment policy in relevant international bodies such as OECD, IEA, World Bank and the "Johannesburg Renewable Energy Coalition - JREC" and use the global increase in the use of renewable energies as a means of making a substantial contribution to climate protection;

7) Medium and long term strategy : the EU should develop a strategy for addressing the medium and long term time frame for renewable energy beyond 2010 along the lines set out in the Commission's

Communication. In developing this strategy, especially as regards possible new long term targets : the progress of international climate change negotiations should be taken into account; the interplay between targets and the EU-emissions trading scheme should be carefully taken into account as this scheme is affecting the energy market conditions; adequate R & D has to be provided.

As regards the setting of new targets on renewable electricity for 2020 this process should start at the end of 2005.

Before deciding on new steps for the period beyond 2010, a thorough assessment of the progress made towards the 2010 targets, the costs and benefits, inter alia to final consumers, and progress in energy efficiency, should be made.