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CLIMATE

1.1. Obama Is Key to Global Climate Agreement, Danish Official Says

13 November 2008, Bloomberg

Negotiators are "on track" to reach an international agreement next year on global warming, Denmark's chief climate negotiator said.

The key to success when delegates from more than 190 nations meet in Copenhagen in December 2009 will be U.S. President-elect Barack Obama's leadership, Thomas Becker said today at a conference in Washington. The U.S. is the only industrialized country to reject the Kyoto Protocol, an emissions-limiting accord that expires in 2012.

"The process in 2009 is of course very much dependent on the new U.S. administration deciding to show early leadership and ambition in the negotiations," said Becker, head of the international department of Denmark's environment ministry. "I see no way of having a new climate-change agreement without that leadership from the new administration."

Obama supports a domestic program to set mandatory limits on heat-trapping emissions and has promised to invest heavily in renewable energy sources that do not emit carbon dioxide. Borrowing from programs in place in Europe and some U.S. states, climate change will be a priority when Obama takes office in January, his environment adviser said yesterday.

Becker rejected suggestions that the banking crisis will delay U.S. environmental measures that increase energy costs until the economy improves. U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman, a Democrat from New Mexico, said yesterday that action in Congress will not be "driven by the international expectation about what we should do."

"The financial crisis does not remove the need for energy independence and security from dangerous climate change," Becker said. "It's more clever to invest in national clean energy than to borrow money from China in order to pay for Middle Eastern oil."

Link: <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601130&sid=abix.zzaEmSI>

ENERGY

2.1. European Commission makes new proposals to improve energy security

13 November 2008, China View

The European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union (EU), on Thursday put forward a wide-ranging package to boost energy security in the EU in a bid to secure sustainable supplies.

Under the package, the Commission proposed a new strategy to increase energy solidarity among member states and a new policy to stimulate investment in more efficient, low-carbon energy networks. The commission proposed the new EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan, which establishes five areas where more action is needed to secure sustainable energy supplies.

"More effective support is needed to projects to build the required infrastructure. The EU has to make better use of its indigenous energy resources, both renewable and fossil," according to the plan.

Among other things, the plan says more attention has to be paid to EU crisis mechanisms, oil stocks and ways to respond to possible gas disruptions. Additional efforts also have to be made to improve energy efficiency, according to the plan.

Presenting the new energy package, European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso called for urgent action to address ever-increasing prices and dependence on energy imports.

"Energy prices have risen by an average of 15 percent in the European Union in the last year. Fifty-four percent of Europe's energy is imported at a cost of 700 euros for every EU citizen," Barroso said. "We have to address this urgently, by taking measures to increase our energy efficiency and reduce our dependence on imports."

He said that the EU needs to invest and diversify and that the proposal demonstrates the commission's desire to guarantee secure and sustainable energy supplies.

European Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs underlined the opportunities for new investment, cost savings and additional jobs.

"The EU has come together as never before to deal with climate change, high energy prices and energy security. But we have to do more, be more ambitious, and be even bolder to avoid the risk of energy disruption in the future," Piebalgs said.

The commissioner said that effort includes investment because investing in energy, including energy efficiency, would give the economy a needed push in the current uncertain times.

The energy package's first priority is to adopt and rapidly implement measures needed to reach EU energy policy targets that are aimed at a 20-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, a 20-percent share for renewables in final energy consumption and a 20-percent saving in future energy demand by 2020.

"Cleaner, more diverse and more efficient energy will be good for Europe's energy supply and economy," the Commission said. "The new rules will also create a more stable, consistent and transparent environment for new energy investments."

The second priority of the package is to address the growing precariousness of Europe's energy supply security.

"Even when the renewable energy policy goals are reached, Europe is likely to be dependent on more imports than today. The EU needs to improve the current policies to achieve its energy efficiency objective," the Commission said.

The Commission also proposed a greater focus on energy in the EU's international relations, including the establishment of relationships with supplier, transit and consumer countries based on interdependence.

Such a proposal would contribute to the achievement of the EU energy policy goals and also increase the EU's influence on international energy developments.

The issue of investment is also central to the package. The EU's networks need billions of investment euros to replace aging infrastructure and adapt to low-carbon and renewable energy.

The new energy package came just one day ahead of the EU-Russia summit in France that will be dominated by energy and the financial crisis.

As the major energy supplier of the 27-member EU, Russia provides about 26 percent of the EU's total oil imports and 29 percent of its natural gas imports.

Reducing its energy dependence on Russia has been a pressing issue for the EU in recent years.

Link: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-11/13/content_10355131.htm

POLICY

3.1. EU needs carbon-free energy policy by mid-century, says WWF

13 November 2008, WWF

The European Commission released today an 'Energy security and solidarity action plan' which addresses some of the gaps in the present EU climate and energy policy, such as the need to strengthen energy efficiency and ease grid access for renewable energies.

Yet, WWF noted major contradictions among suggested policies, lack of ambition and a Christmas tree of actions with little relevance for the environmental and economic objectives outlined in the proposals. For one, no mandatory target for energy efficiency has been included in the package.

Energy efficiency is the most immediate and cost-effective solution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, ensure resilience to economic crisis and improve security of energy supply in Europe.

Despite this, it remains the 'Cinderella' in the European Union energy policy.

"Proposed measures fail in ambition as they do not include a mandatory energy saving target of 20 per cent by 2020 for the European Union - a key move to reduce consumers energy bill, boost innovation, facilitate the achievement of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets and support a strong EU performance at international climate negotiations," says Mariangiola Fabbri, Energy Policy Officer at WWF.

As Europe's buildings account for 40 per cent of EU final energy use, WWF sees the improvement of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive as a priority and an opportunity not to be missed to strengthen EU's climate and energy goals.

"EU countries should have been obliged to have stricter standards for both existing and new buildings by 2015. We need to shift buildings from being energy wasters to climate savers," adds Mariangiola Fabbri.

On a positive note, WWF is pleased to see that the EU intends to embark on the 'Renewable energy supergrid', an innovative electricity highway to connect solar power from Southern Europe and North Africa, offshore wind power produced in the Atlantic and other renewable energy sources from the mainland. WWF, however, is concerned that continuous focus on fossil fuels might undermine this project.

"The renewable energy supergrid must become a priority as it has the potential to provide renewable electricity to all European citizens and make the European energy sector carbon-free in the decades to come", said Dr Stephan Singer, WWF's Global Energy Policy Director.

"It is disappointing, though, to see new investments for infrastructures that keep Europe dependent on oil, gas and other conventional fuels which counteract the benefit of renewable energy."

WWF urges the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers to strengthen the laws and come to an agreement before the EU elections, in June 2009.

Link:

http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/europe/what_we_do/wwf_europe_environment/index.cfm?uNewsID=150361

TRANSPORT

4.1. EU continues to turn deaf ear to traffic noise as MEPs vote for weaker limits

12 November 2008, T&E

Millions of European citizens troubled by road traffic noise have had their hopes of a quieter and healthier life set back by a deal between MEPs, the tyre industry and the Italian government.

The blow has come because MEPs have recommended watering down proposed legislation to make car tyres quieter and more energy-efficient.

Despite well-documented advances in EU rules on exhaust emissions from road vehicles, legislation on tyres has lagged far behind and has never set limits that act as an incentive to improved technology.

Legislation proposed by the Commission in May set out minimum noise and 'rolling resistance' standards for tyres, which would mean the most noisy and inefficient tyres would be removed from sale in Europe by 2018 at the latest.

But even those standards, which noise and environmental campaigners say do not go nearly far enough, have been rejected by the European Parliament's industry committee in a vote earlier this month.

The vote seeks to water down and delay the legislation, to the point where noisy and fuel-inefficient tyres could continue to be sold indefinitely.

A YEAR LATE

'This is a major setback to preventing premature deaths, improving quality of life and fighting climate change,' said T&E policy officer Nina Renshaw.

'Reduced rolling resistance can make cars up to 5% more fuel-efficient, which directly reduces CO2 emissions. And a cut of 3 decibels would halve traffic noise, which would be massive given that around 50 000 Europeans die early from the impact of road noise each year, and noise from tyres is primarily responsible.

'This legislation was nearly a year late when it came out in May, and now it's under serious threat. Why is it that when we have what is really a win/win situation our MEPs persist in supporting a policy of inaction that has failed Europe's citizens for nearly 40 years?'

The proposed legislation was attacked by the tyre industry lobby group ETRMA. It appears to have won support from the government of Italy – home to one of Europe's largest tyre producers, Pirelli – whose official position carried large sections of the tyre industry's demands, including exact limit suggestions. The industry committee is not the leading committee on the tyres issue, so its vote only has 'opinion' status. The internal market committee has the lead role and votes early next month; it could stand by the Commission's proposals.

Renshaw added: 'We urge MEPs to throw out the industry-backed alterations. What the Commission is proposing is hardly revolutionary, in fact it is in some ways a very slow way to make up for past inaction. If even this chance is missed, it will be a kick in the teeth for Europe's citizens who are dying and suffering from heart disease and learning difficulties because of road noise, as well as a setback for efforts to fight climate change.'

Recent research from the World Health Organisation says the number of 'disability-adjusted life years' is 40% greater for road traffic noise than for outdoor air pollution.

Link: <http://www.transportenvironment.org/News/2008/11/EU-continues-to-turn-deaf-ear-to-traffic-noise-as-MEPs-vote-for-weaker-limits/>

4.2. Dutch lead opposition to French attempts to weaken CO2 standards for new cars

12 November 2008, T&E

The battle over limiting CO2 emissions from new cars goes on, with the French presidency saying it is determined to conclude a deal by the end of this year.

France has offered what it calls 'further concessions' to gain the support of sceptical countries, but these have only made the proposed legislation even less acceptable to environmental groups.

With negotiations between MEPs and the presidency now beginning, France is still trying to push through a version of the Merkel-Sarkozy agreement reached between the French and German leaders in June. The centrepiece of this agreement was a 'phased-in approach' which effectively means a postponement of three years to 2015.

But other countries – notably the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark – are pushing for a much stricter deal. At a meeting of environment ministers last month, the Dutch said the Commission's original position of 130 grams per kilometre by 2012 should be supported if the EU was not to lose credibility regarding its climate change goals for 2020.

The Dutch statement to the meeting said: 'In June 2007, the Environment Council requested stringent measures aimed at the car industry: 120 g/km CO2 in 2012 (130 g/km to be achieved by means of technical innovation and a further 10 g/km by means of additional measures), plus ambitious long-term goals for 2020. In this regard, it is alarming that the contribution made by passenger cars is at risk of being severely weakened, putting the climate change objective at stake.'

The European news agency EurActiv said there was 'wide-ranging support' for the Dutch stance among EU environment ministers, notably from Denmark, but also Belgium, Finland and other states.

LOW INTEREST LOAN

The debate over CO2 limits coincides with a request by the European car makers for a low-cost EU loan of €40 billion, which they say is necessary if they are to develop cleaner technologies. This has the support of the President Sarkozy, who said after an informal EU summit last month: 'Can we ask the European car industry to produce clean cars – to change the whole industrial system in just a few months – without giving them a helping hand?'

Yet the latest presidency proposal, far from envisaging change in 'just a few months', foresees car makers having to ensure 60% of their new cars meet the 130g limit in 2012, 75% in 2013, 85% in 2015 and 100% by 2015. Research for T&E has confirmed what many suspected anyway – that the phasing option is in effect a postponement to 2015.

'It's almost as if France is pretending September's vote in the European Parliament supporting a 130g limit by 2012 just didn't happen,' said T&E director Jos Dings. 'We must hope that MEPs stand up for

