

EREF Press Release

On the road to net-zero – Europe needs higher and stronger targets and ambition

Brussels, 7 February 2024

The Commission presented its recommendation for a 2040 emissions reduction target to set the path to climate neutrality in 2050. EREF and its members, national renewable energy associations from across Europe, highly welcome this proposal, which marks a significant step towards a green future.

Yet, the formulated objectives remain short-sighted and lack the necessary ambition required to effectively tackle the major threats posed by climate change. We therefore urgently call on the new Commission to create and faster implement far-reaching policies capable of driving a real sustainable transformation.

The proposed Greenhouse Gas reduction target of 90 % by 2050 - as high as it sounds at first sight - is still too low. The last ten percent will be the more difficult to achieve, therefore we need a higher target now to set a clear political commitment and provide the needed investment signals for policy, industry, service, research and citizens alike in our joint transformation process.

Scientific evidence suggests that global temperatures could reach a critical increase of 1.5°C by 2024, underlining the urgency of more robust measures to protect our environment and our societies.

EREF thus strongly urges the new Commission to suggest and support a **95% EU emission reduction target for 2040**, following the recommendations put forward by the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change to reduce net emissions by at least 90-95% until 2040 (relative to 1990 levels).

This needs to go hand in hand with **2035 and 2040 binding national targets for renewable energies and energy efficiency**. These targets are key for the effective and consequent decarbonisation of Europe's economies. EREF Director Dörte Fouquet highlighted: "We lost so much time and energy with some Member States - before and after BREXIT – that shy away from taking responsibility and hide behind "CO2- only" targets" and EU-wide renewable energy targets."

EREF urges the Commission to include amendments that provide for long-term energy and climate planning at national level, thereby preventing the risk of freeriding as is already shown in many National Energy and Climate Plans of Member States.

EREF underlines that the recently revised target levels for renewables are still not sufficient to reach our goals. While applauding the commitment to triple the global installed renewable energy capacity by 2030, as set out in the final COP28 declaration, we call for concrete EU actions to deliver on this promise, such as ambitious renewable energy targets that go beyond the existing 42.5% target of 2030.

Nuclear is no solution but the current Commission remains highjacked by vested interests. The recommendation by the Commission identifies “low-carbon solutions” such as nuclear power as one of the main drivers for decarbonising the energy system and announces the launch of an Industrial Alliance to accelerate the deployment of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).

Low-carbon energy sources are framed as a solution but in fact, they are part of the problem. As EREF pointed out, nuclear energy (i) implies high costs in both construction, waste storage, and management (ii) has important proven risks and potential major health impacts (iii) has been an unreliable power source in times of drought in some countries and (iv) often takes many years longer than planned to be realised, hence delaying potential GHG emission reductions far into the future. Due to its centralised structure, it risks delaying the development of decentralised renewable energy systems, including by diverting subsidies meant to support renewables, hence distorting both competition and the power market(s).

Relying on nuclear and any non-renewable energy forms is useless, burns money, increases security risks for the population and nature and undermines public trust in the EU’s climate policies. It would delay much-needed investments in the manufacture, deployment, operation, maintenance, and recycling of renewable energy technologies in Europe. EREF agrees that any nuclear deviation would further damage European competitiveness in the crucial renewable energy sector vis-à-vis the US and China who are stepping up their regulatory support of renewables, including for technology export purposes.

EREF further **advocates for separate targets for energy storage and interconnectivity**, which are prerequisites for meeting the significant new challenges posed by the rapid expansion of renewable energy technologies. Concrete actions are needed to ensure cost-effective and reliable systems.

The 2040 EU Climate Targets pave the way for a sustainable green transition. However, further substantive steps must be taken outside of our comfort zone to achieve this goal within the limited time available. Now, it is the time for the new Commission to develop forward-thinking, ambitious, and inclusive policies to turn this vision into reality.

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