

Energy efficiency

## Debate drags on in ITRE

By Tamás Kugyela | Thursday 12 January 2012

The outcome of the debate at the European Parliament's Committee on Industry (ITRE) on the draft Energy Efficiency Directive, on 12 January, was drawing closer to the standpoint of the Council: MEPs recognised the need to give more flexibility to member states in choosing their methods to achieve a pre-defined efficiency target. Several MEPs across the political spectrum voiced their concerns that too rigid prescribed measures may not be in line with already launched national programmes or would absolutely not be cost-effective for certain member states.

Rapporteur Claude Turmes (Greens-EFA, Luxembourg) welcomed "the U-turn of the European People's Party, which in majority used to be against such binding targets, but finally understood that more of those could bring more security for investors". In an inspirational speech, he reminded the participants that this "directive is one of the pieces of legislation that can pull the EU out of the financial crisis". He demonstrated this point with the example of Russia, with which the EU's trade deficit increased with €20 billion in 2011, mostly due to the purchase of hydrocarbon resources. "We are creating wealth in Europe only to send altogether €77 billion to a country whose leadership and political system we deeply disapprove of," he added.

Adam Gierek (S&D, Poland) admitted misunderstandings have sprung up since day one of the committee's work on the dossier, because the definition of energy efficiency is still lacking and there is no shared understanding of how it should be measured. The question of whether to define targets based on the number of units of energy used to create a unit of GDP (energy intensity) or to go along instead with a 20% reduction in absolute energy consumption is still on the table, albeit MEPs now seem to favour the former option.

Fiona Hall (ALDE, UK) called attention to "a strong feeling in the Parliament to get the directive work for the people," which in practical terms means that MEPs will support an enhanced roll-out of demand response systems, enabling end consumers to play an active role in managing their own savings (Article 12).

Agreement is within reach on energy audits (Article 7) and possible sanctions (Article 9), but the groups are still "talking at cross-purposes on the fundamental points," commented Markus Pieper (EPP, Germany). The demand for energy suppliers to achieve 1.5% savings in the annual consumption of their customers, a requirement for the public sector to renovate 3% of its buildings' total floor area, and the call to develop high-efficiency co-generation and district heating and cooling (CHP-DHC) still feature high on the agenda.

Regarding this last issue, Alejo Vidal-Quadras (EPP, Spain) pointed out that deployment of CHP is "not possible in a general obligatory way, but only where it is technologically possible - otherwise it would be counterproductive". Turning to the touchy issue of public renovation rates, he mentioned that buildings' energy performance may be enhanced not only through refurbishment but also via efficiency-services and metering.