Commission boasts of good progress on renewables
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The European Commission, on 11 March, published a summary of national renewable energy forecast documents, indicating member states' expectations of the national share of renewable energy in 2020. According to the executive, the national forecasts show that the EU is on track to meet and even surpass its overall 20% target by 2020 (20.3%). Under the RES Directive (2009/28/EC), member states were to have submitted their national forecast documents by the end of December 2009. Twelve member states failed that first deadline and by 1 February, Greece, Italy, Malta and UK still had not submitted the documents required.

Despite member states not meeting the submission deadline, Commissioner Günther Oettinger still sees the forecasts as proof that member states are taking renewable energy "very seriously". "Our task will be to help all member states not only to reach the 20% target but to go beyond," said Oettinger in a prepared statement. Renewables accounted for 9% of total energy consumption in 2007. Some 63% of this came from biomass and biowaste.

The summary report notes that at least ten member states expect to have a surplus in 2020, compared to their binding (minimum) target for the share of renewable energy in their final energy consumption (Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden). This surplus could then be (statistically) transferred to another member state.

LARGEST SURPLUSES

Spain and Germany forecast the largest surpluses in absolute terms, of 2.7 Mtoe and 1.4 Mtoe, respectively. The Commission estimates the total quantity of the surplus at around 5.5 Mtoe, or around 2% of the total renewables needed in 2020. A further 12 member states say they will solely meet their goals domestically (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and the UK).

Five member states (Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Luxembourg and Malta) expect to have a deficit in 2020 compared to their binding target for the share of renewable energy in their final energy consumption. The quantity amounts to around 2 Mtoe (<1% of the total renewable energy needed in 2020). Italy forecasts the largest deficit in absolute terms, of 1.2 Mtoe.

The national forecast documents, nonetheless, need to be taken with a pinch of salt. Unlike the national renewable energy action plans (NREAPs), due in June 2010, there was no specific format required. Most member states concentrated on the net use of cooperation mechanisms. Some member states, however, went further, providing detailed forecasts of the sectoral breakdown of the renewable energy development up to 2020 (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Ireland, Latvia, Malta and Romania). Other member states (Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania) provided a technology breakdown.

Whilst the forecast documents represent the countries' stated intentions as to promoting renewables, RES growth must still be obtained on the ground. Factors such as the price of fossil fuels, investment in new energy technologies and the ability of member states to speed up authorisation procedures and integration of renewables will also influence the ability to meet targets.

The Commission's report also indicates how little spare room there is for those member states that do not meet their targets with their own domestic renewable energy. The Commission readily admits that the so-called 'cooperation' mechanism, allowing the statistical transfer of renewables, will only play a "minor" role. "Only around 2 Mtoe of the total renewable energy needed in 2020 will be traded between member states or third countries. In percentage terms, this amounts to less than one per cent," states the Commission.

The summary report also underlines the expected rise in the share of electricity from renewable energy sources, up to 33%-35% in 2020. Portugal and Sweden expect to have the highest shares of renewable electricity in 2020, of 58% and 62%, respectively. With respect to the 10% target for renewable energy in the transport sector, Ireland and Sweden expect to exceed this with 11% and 13.8%, respectively.