

Industry outraged at Commission's U-turn

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Major organisations representing the biofuels value chain joined forces, on 17 October, to air their bitter disappointment with the European Commission's plans to limit to 5% the contribution of crop-based biofuels toward the bloc's 2020 renewable energy target (see *Europolitics* 4510). At a joint press conference, the European Biodiesel Board (EBB), COCERAL, Copa-Cogeca, ePURE and FEDIOL warned that the proposal, put forward earlier the same day by the EU executive, will "decimate the biofuels industry" and have a "negative impact" on the diversification of farmers' revenues. They jointly described the 5% cap on biofuels as "unacceptable". Commenting on behalf of FEDIOL, an organisation representing the interests of the European vegetable oils and proteinmeal industry, Nathalie Lecocq, director-general, slammed the Commission for its U-turn on biofuels policy only three years after the 10% renewable energy target for crop-based biofuels was set. She argued that the proposal has plunged the biofuels industry into a "crisis situation". According to Lecocq, the industry faces huge job and wealth losses, 30% and 40%, respectively. She also warned against a crisis of confidence among investors, who based their decisions on the 10% target set in 2009.

Rob Vierhout, secretary-general of ePURE, the organisation representing the interests of European renewable ethanol producers, warned that, if adopted in its current version, the proposal would put an end to the biofuels industry in the EU. He accused the Commission of siding with the environmental and food NGOs, which blame the industry for fuelling hunger and land grabs around the world (4510). "The Commission is being hyper politically correct. It adopted an NGO-driven decision," said Vierhout.

Raffaello Garofalo, secretary-general of the European Biodiesel Board, rejected the argumentation used by the NGOs and said that contrary to what is claimed by green activists, "the biodiesel industry produces and secures food in Europe". He said it was totally unacceptable that the Commission based its decision on the indirect land use change (ILUC) criteria on one report by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). "The model used for the report is not suitable for precisely estimating the extent of land use change and the resulting greenhouse gas emissions, due to critical data errors and important methodical problems," the industry representatives said in a joint statement. They welcomed the fact that the Commission at the last moment dropped the idea to make the ILUC criteria mandatory. "It is a good decision, which makes us a little bit less disappointed," Lecocq commented.

Representing farmers' interests, Pekka Pesonen, secretary-general of Copa-Cogeca, described the Commission's move to cap the share of crop-based biofuels in the 2020 renewable energy target as devastating for the farmers. He also criticised the plan to phase out biofuels made from certain arable crops as of 2020. "It will jeopardise investments, jobs in rural areas and prevent the development of advanced biofuels," the joint statement said.