

Report on Renewable Energy
for Europe
Campaign for Take-Off
Altener 2000 Conference,
Centre de Congrès Pierre Baudis,
Toulouse, France,
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E n v i r o n m e n t

PATCHY PROGRESS IN DRIVE TOWARDS CLEAN ENERGY

Very uneven progress is being made by the European countries to achieve the EU's targets to replace energy from fossil fuel sources with ecologically sound energy from renewable sources. Some countries are doing well in certain sectors, experts at Europe's major forum in the field heard at a conference at Toulouse, SW France, held from 23-25 October.

Europe's goal is to double its renewable energy to achieve a 12 per cent proportion of all energy used originating from renewable sources by 2010. This target was set by EU governments in 1998. Renewable energy, which does not contribute to greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, comprises mainly:- biomass energy, such as diesel fuel extracted from plants grown on farms; wind energy from turbines; electricity generated by photovoltaic panels using sunshine; and water heated directly also by sunshine.

In order for Europe to achieve its objective requires that countries and sectors that are lagging behind have to be given more attention, or Europe would miss its target, Mr François Lamoureux, Director General of the European Commission's directorate-general that co-ordinates the programme, told delegates at the "Altener 2000" conference.

Mr Lamoureux suggested that backward programmes should be brought forward. This would need progress in some sectors requiring attention in the fields of investment-friendly legislation, tax reform, financing, and improved co-operation including more public-private partnerships.

Delegates heard that Europe is having trouble on its route to the 12 per cent target despite double digit growth rates in certain types of renewable energy. The renewables share appears to be stagnating between 5 and 5.4 per cent, because the total primary energy consumption of the European Union has also been growing rapidly. Current forecasting puts the 2010 proportion of energy from renewable sources at something between 9.8 per cent at the worst, and 12.5 per cent at the best, which would be above the target.

Sector statistics show that, in 1999, wind-power in Europe reached 9182 MW, dominating the world total of 13356, and compared with 6427 in 1998. Leaders in Europe were Germany, with 4440, Denmark with 1761 and Spain with 1478 MW capacity.

In the biogas subsector biomass renewable energy, (biogas is produced from digesting farm animal manure and sewage), in 1999 the lead country by far was Spain, with 13 900 GWh, out of the EU total of 22205. Sweden came second, with 1360 GWh production.

Delegates at the Toulouse conference were aware of the taxation situation for farm-crop-based diesel fuel, where tax help is necessary to make it price competitive with conventional fossil fuel pumped from oil reserves.

Farm-produced diesel fuel does not add to carbon dioxide pollution because it draws in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere during the growing period.

Carbon dioxide is the main greenhouse gas, responsible for climate change, including sea level rises that are threatening millions of poor people living in low-level coastal areas and catastrophic floodings inland in many parts of the world.

The Toulouse conference brought together leading European renewables strategists and senior government officials, plus representatives from other institutional, financial, and industrial bodies. Their task was to discuss progress of the EU strategy. This strategy was originally published under the title "Energy for the Future: Renewable Sources of Energy". The White Paper was prepared by the European Commission, and it was endorsed by the European Parliament and Council of Ministers in May 1998.

Delegates heard that the uneven pattern of adoption of renewable energy sources includes the fact that, for example, solar thermal energy has increased significantly in Austria and Germany, in spite of having less promising natural resources than in southern countries.

While countries such as Denmark, Germany and Spain have experienced a real take-off, other countries while having even higher potential, have not been developing at as high a rate.

A number of EU Member States have already announced ambitious national programmes which will also contribute the Campaign for Take Off (CTO), the European Commission's kick-start initiative, which runs until 2003.

The conference, was organised for the Commission by ADEME, the French Agency for the Environment and Energy Management, with a financial contribution from CTO funds. The CTO is co-ordinated with partial funding by the European Commission's promotion programme for renewables "Altener II" (1998 - 2002).

The conference venue, Toulouse, resulted from an invitation by the current French EU presidency, including financial support from various French authorities and other bodies. Detailed information on the European Union's and Member States' renewable energy programmes is available at www.agores.org, which links to many other relevant websites.

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