



Energy-saving buildings: agreement reached

All buildings built after 31 December 2020 must have high energy-saving standards and be powered to a large extent by renewable energy. Public authorities will lead the way two years earlier and part of the funding for these changes will come from the EU. These are among the key points of a deal reached on Tuesday evening between Parliament and Council negotiators.

By the end of 2020 EU Member States must ensure that all newly-constructed buildings have a "very high energy performance", under new rules agreed in Brussels on Monday night. And their energy needs must be covered to a very significant extent from renewable sources, including energy produced on-site or nearby.

The public sector must set an example by owning or renting only this kind of building by the end of 2018 and by promoting the conversion of existing buildings into "nearly zero" standard. It is only thanks to European Parliament negotiators that specific target dates will be included in this legislation.

After the successful conclusion of informal negotiations on Tuesday between Parliament and the Council, rapporteur Silvia-Adriana Ticău (S&D, RO) said the political agreement reinforces the EU's leading role in fighting climate change: "At the Copenhagen Conference, Europe could present an effective tool to make the ambitious environmental objectives happen. We are committed to invest more and to better use the financial instruments for the energy efficiency of buildings and renewable energy."

More financial support at national and European level

The Council took on board Parliament's amendments which require Member States to draw up national plans for increasing the number of nearly zero energy buildings. They must also, by mid-2011, make a list of financial and other incentives for the transition, such as technical assistance, subsidies, loan schemes and low interest loans.

Existing buildings will have to improve their energy performance after major renovations, if this would be technically, functionally and economically feasible. Member States must therefore encourage the owners to use the renovation for installing smart meters and replacing existing heating, hot-water plumbing and air-conditioning with high-efficiency alternatives such as heat pumps or renewable based systems.

Energy performance certificates

Member States will have to ensure that energy performance certificates are issued for any buildings constructed, sold or rented out to a new tenant, and also for buildings where over 500 m² are occupied by a public authority and frequently visited by the public. Five years after the legislation takes effect, this threshold will be lowered to 250 m². Buildings that already have a certificate issued in accordance with the previous directive, dating from 2002, will not need to obtain a new one as long as the old one is still valid.

The certificates will have to provide recommendations for improvement and may also include additional information such as annual energy consumption and percentage of renewable energy in total energy consumption.

Press release

The certification systems for residential buildings will be the responsibility of national authorities, but the Commission should by 2011 develop a voluntary common European certification scheme for the energy performance of non-residential buildings.

Exemptions for historic buildings, holiday homes and others

However, the following are excluded from the directive's requirements: small houses (with a floor area of less than 50m²), holiday homes used for less than four months a year (or that use less than 25% of all-year energy consumption), buildings for religious activities, temporary buildings used for two years or less, industrial sites, workshops and agricultural buildings with low energy demand and protected historic buildings where an energy-efficiency measure would "unacceptably alter their character or appearance".

Next steps

The compromise text agreed on Tuesday still has to be formally approved by the Council before the full Parliament gives its final endorsement at the beginning of 2010. Once adopted and published in the EU Official Journal, Member States will have two years to bring their national laws into line with the new directive.

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