

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “An EU
Strategy on Heating and Cooling”
COM(2016) 51 final**

APPROVED FINAL DOCUMENT

The Committee on Environment and the Committee on Economic Activities of Italy’s Chamber of Deputies,

having examined, pursuant to Rule of Procedure 127 of the Chamber of Deputies, the Communication of the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, “An EU Strategy on Heating and Cooling” (COM(2016) 51),

with reference to the useful intelligence and analyses collected in the course of hearings;

whereas:

The presentation of the strategy marks another milestone in the process of implementing the Energy Union, one of the most ambitious projects in the EU’s climate-change prevention policy;

Heating and cooling account for half the total primary energy use within the EU, and 75 percent of this energy still comes from fossil fuels;

More efficient heating and cooling systems not only lower polluting emissions but also offer the substantial economic advantage of lower energy bills for businesses and households. Lower energy consumption reduces the EU’s dependence on external suppliers, and the drive to achieve greater efficiencies offers an excellent opportunity for European industry to innovate technologically;

A common EU strategy is needed also in view of the considerable discrepancies of standards among EU Member States. For example, while Baltic and Nordic countries mainly use renewable energy for heating and cooling and are increasingly experimenting with district heating and cogeneration, other countries, including Italy, mainly use polluting fuels, often for obsolete heating systems;

Ample scope for reducing waste exists, especially if one considers that the heat produced by industrial processes and dispersed in the air or water is enough to satisfy the total heating demand of all the residential and commercial buildings of the EU;

Renewable energy sources, which make up 18% of the total primary energy destined for heating and cooling, are generally underexploited, and the potential for increasing their use is considerable;

A large number of European buildings, mostly more than fifty years old, have not been upgraded to new energy technologies. In spite of several initiatives, the number of existing buildings refitted for energy efficiency is currently less than one percent of the total stock. It is necessary to intervene directly to accelerate the process of building renovation;

acknowledging that this document must be forwarded to the European Commission, the Council and the EU Parliament;

does hereby express itself favourable to the Communication,

with the following remarks:

- a) A set of concrete follow-up actions must now support the European Commission's efforts to encourage the renovation of existing buildings, with an emphasis on entire buildings (public or private) rather than on individual residential units, an approach that should permit substantial economies of scale. Specific measures should be taken to encourage the renovation of the heating and cooling installations of condominiums, given that 41 percent of the EU population lives in apartments (in Italy, half of all homes are condominium apartments);
- b) An efficacious European-level policy implies the adoption of national policies that are coherent and maximise what can be achieved. Incentives such as the so-called "eco-bonus", which has produced good results in Italy in spite of being mostly used for renovation work on individual apartments, could be made comparatively more attractive to condominiums than to individual units. Projects to improve the energy class of buildings could be encouraged through the release of more resources from the National Fund for Energy Efficiency, set up under article 15 of Legislative Decree 102 of 2014;
- c) Flexible and innovative solutions are needed to address the problem of consumers whose income is inadequate to cover the associated costs of refitting. In addition to tax breaks,

these consumers should also have access to some sort of financial instrument covering most of the costs of upgrading to more energy-efficient homes;

- d)* In addition to renovation, emphasis should also be placed on “energy intelligence” (better management and efficiency of consumption). To this end, consumers must be given real-time access to their energy data, so that they may change their habits;
- e)* Consumers need to be made more aware of the opportunities for energy efficiency in residential units, and operators in the building trade, including engineers, need to receive the necessary training;
- f)* Any measures designed to reward eco-friendly projects should be directed towards advanced technologies and techniques with the lowest environmental impact, which means curbing not only CO₂ emissions but also the emissions of other substances with an adverse effect on air quality;
- g)* The reliability and, above all, the practical usefulness of energy performance certificates for buildings needs to be enhanced, especially since the certificates have the potential to become a major source of data on the current state of the national housing stock;
- h)* Self-generation and the storage of energy from renewable sources are two areas to be encouraged, which may include measures to promote on-site exchanges, while also equitably dividing the costs of the system. Such an arrangement could cut the costs of running the energy grid and help, for example, meet the demand for energy used for cooling, and, generally, reduce the losses of the system and increase its resilience;
- i)* To achieve the targets of energy efficiency, improve the environment and air quality, and reduce CO₂ emissions in large urban centres by reducing the number of private and condominium boilers and heating units, it seems advisable to favour district heating through policies like those used by the EU countries that have made most progress in this area. The policies could leverage already extant instruments of energy efficiency such as “green” certificates to provide incentives for the development of grids that allow energy savings by using recovered heat (in district heating systems) or energy from renewable sources;
- j)* Measures to increase efficiency and energy savings in the world of business and commerce are needed, especially among small and medium enterprises, which should be apprised of the benefits of investing in energy efficiency and in the use of efficient and clean fuel. The

measures should also be targeted at customer service buildings such as banks, offices and shops, which have an average energy consumption per square meter that is 40 percent higher than homes;

- k)* The gap between the most and least advanced countries of the EU in this area needs to be bridged. This might entail the adoption of policies to favour the penetration of district heating, and could include incentives (such as tax deductions) for the construction of grids designed to save energy and reduce carbon emissions. This could be achieved by eliminating private and condominium boilers and heaters, and replacing them with district heating networks that use recovered heat or renewable energy;
- l)* As the work required to attain the energy efficiency targets that the EU has set itself will require, according to the forecasts of the European Commission, a doubling of the current level of investment, it will be necessary to find additional resources other than those indicated in the Communication (investment and structural funds, and the Horizon 2020 research programme). Accordingly, a more intense use of the potential of the EIB seems advisable.