

Energy efficiency in the Community: strategy for the rational use of energy

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PURPOSE: to present the initial elements of a new strategy for achieving energy efficiency in the EC.

CONTENT: The underlying assumption behind this Commission communication is that, whilst energy intensity has decreased slowly but surely over recent years, it is essential to take the necessary steps to ensure that energy efficiency is substantially improved, and reflected in a significantly reduced level of energy intensity. The Commission considers that the focus of this strategy over the next years has to be the full realisation of the significant economic potential for the improvement in energy efficiency which exists in the EU, estimated to be, by 2010, as much as 18% of 1995 energy consumption. The role of Member States and of regional and local authorities will be crucial in this context as much of the action on energy efficiency takes place at national level. In parallel with action at Community level, the Commission therefore considers it important to encourage Member States to develop their own national strategies. In this context, consideration will need to be given to setting an objective to reduce energy intensity at Community and national levels, as well as in different sectoral activities. In its communication, the Commission: 1) highlights the potential for improving energy efficiency between 1998 and 2010 - estimated to amount to 18% of final annual energy consumption for 1995; 2) examines the imperfections, barriers and shortcomings which have so far prevented this potential from being realised - these include energy prices which do not reflect energy costs, lack of or incomplete information, institutional and legal, technical and financial barriers; 3) reviews existing measures for energy efficiency and concludes that there is a need to better focus and coordinate Community and Member States measures, to improve and strengthen existing measures, to facilitate exchanges of experience and best practice, select priority areas of action and encourage energy efficiency potential outside the Union through international cooperation; 4) sets out the elements of a strategy for the rational use of energy, which comprise: - building on existing Community energy efficiency initiatives; - closer monitoring and evaluation of progress by the Commission; - increased cooperation with a wide variety of actors throughout the Community; - awareness-raising by Member States; - better coordination of actions by means of a special energy efficiency forum; - improving the profile of promotion of energy efficiency. The Commission concludes that, if a basic package of measures such as those which it proposes, is implemented in an effective and coordinated fashion, it would have a measurable impact on reducing energy intensity in the Community over and above the trend of recent years (-0.6% p.a.). Against the background of expected continuing low energy prices, the expected additional annual reduction of 1% resulting from such measures must be regarded as an achievement. In presenting this document, the Commission also wishes to prepare the ground for the adoption of coordinated policies and actions which will help the EU to meet its commitment, undertaken at Kyoto, to reduce CO₂ emissions. It also represents a first step towards the production by the Commission of an Action Plan for Energy Efficiency.