

Renewable, decentralised, highly effective

CIPRA Demands on Energy

In order to limit global warming, first of all it is important that we use energy more efficiently. Yet this will not be enough for operating in a way that climate can sustain. We must radically change our energy consumption and our consumption of energy-intensive goods and services. Experience shows that consumption only goes down when clear political signals are sent — which include legislative initiatives, rewarding energy saving and punishing waste. The switch from fossil to renewable energies must be forced — but not to the detriment of nature. Biomass production, the installation of wind power turbines and new hydroelectric power stations in the Alps hide many potential conflicts. The environmental, social and economic consequences of climate projects must be carefully assessed and compared.

CIPRA requests:

(1) An Energy Vision for the Alps

In the post-oil age there will be an increasing decentralisation of energy generation. This energy change must be supported by social and environmental tax reforms, an infrastructure and spatial planning policy to reduce traffic, as well as by a technology policy which enables further rises in efficiency. In order to bundle these strategies, CIPRA requests an “Energy vision for the Alps“, which must be defined together with all stakeholders from the economy, civil society and local institutions. It can be drafted within two years, and then enforced by the Alpine Convention and the EU strategy for the Alpine space, and be rapidly implemented thereafter. It must foster and regulate energy saving and efficiency increases, the construction mode of new plants for the production of renewable energy (wind, water, sun, biomass, etc.), so that they do not damage nature and landscape.

(2) Save energy

If we want to limit global warming in future years to a tolerable extent of around two degrees, we must reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by approximately 80 percent. We can only succeed if we sharply reduce our energy consumption. Legislation for this purpose is necessary, and energy prices must include the environmental and social costs of energy production. Waste must not be rewarded and supported by governments.

(3) More efficient hydroelectric power stations instead of new ones

The expansion or modernisation of hydroelectric power stations can enormously increase their efficiency level in the short term: there are examples where modernisation has led to tripling power generation, whereby the environmental situation was even improved thanks to accompanying measures. Such improvements have priority over constructing new hydroelectric power stations, with their negative impacts on nature and landscape. The environmental friendliness must be checked and ensured in all revamping projects, or — when interferences are inevitable — these must be compensated according to the water framework directive of the EU and national laws. The contracting parties to the Alpine Convention are requested to overhaul their respective legal requirements for the promotion of environmentally friendly electricity. Regulations must be changed so that efficiency increases and the optimisation of existing hydroelectric power plants are more strongly supported and no new environmentally damaging plants are promoted.

(4) A sustainable use of energy

Countries, regions and municipalities in the Alpine arch are invited to draft exhaustive and, where possible, concrete programmes, which speed up the switch to renewable energies. Such models include the Swiss project “Energienstadt/ Energy city“ or the “e5” Austrian city programme. The allocation of funds in the energy sector must be made dependent on the fact that municipal applicants are obliged to state their participation in such programmes.

(5) Nuclear Power Plants are not a Future Option

Nuclear power must no longer figure in the future power supply of the Alps. Greenhouse gas emissions are released by the construction, maintenance and demolition of these power plants. The nuclear combustion cycle swallows significant quantities of fossil energy. Uranium is a finite raw material — based on current demand, its extraction might become unprofitable by 2030. Only 30% of the energy released by nuclear fission can be utilised and large quantities of waste heat are produced, leading to environmental impacts such as heating of rivers caused by discharge waters. The risk of catastrophic events is indissolubly linked with nuclear power. In addition, radioactive material is produced, which represents a significant risk for the safety of current and future generations.

Schaan, november 2009