

INTERVIEW WITH WILL WACHTMEISTER, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF MICROPOWER EUROPE

Energy efficiency and renewables: Do both

By Dafydd ab Iago

One of the latest additions to Brussels' long list of industry associations is Micro-power Europe. The association brings together a number of companies, such as Mitsubishi, E.ON, British Gas New Energy, Whisper Tech and Windsave. The aim is not only to promote micro-generation products but also to push energy efficiency in the built environment. Europolitics spoke to the association's Secretary-General, Will Wachtmeister.

Why does Brussels need another trade association for energy efficiency and renewables?

We promote a holistic approach to reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions in the built environment. We're not saying renewables are the full answer, or energy efficiency has all the answers, we're saying do both. You have to support all available technologies – just backing one or two will only get you so far. With these products set to become mainstream soon, we also have to tackle common issues for these technologies.

What do you mean by a holistic solution?

No two buildings are the same, so no two buildings require the same solution – if you want to make a building better for the environment, you need all possible tools. Climate, budget, building characteristics and personal preferences call for case-by-case, holistic solutions that involve choice, ranging from simple energy efficiency to the most high technology renewable solutions. By separating out energy efficiency and renewables, you will often get suboptimal outcomes.

Are you happy with the new Renewables Directive?

We strongly support the legislation in its entirety. One important point is making sure that the RES Directive does not inadvertently lead to a lowering of standards, for instance with respect to heat pumps – just because the electricity used to drive the heat pump will get cleaner doesn't

mean the bar for what counts as renewable should be lowered. We also feel one should not overlook the fact that increasing the share of renewables in energy consumption means large investments in



Wachtmeister: "We promote a holistic approach"

energy reduction as well as renewables: in fact, Recital 17 of the RES Directive says so very clearly.

Why do you use the phrase 'energy reduction', not energy efficiency?

Energy efficiency is a means to an end – what matters is the extent to which it lowers energy consumption. Strictly speaking, the 20-20-20 goals agreed by member states in the beginning of 2007 actually talk of increasing energy efficiency to achieve a 20% energy saving target of the EU's energy consumption. That's just as well because it is possible to use energy more efficiently but still use more – energy efficient fridges are great but if people buy more of them, they don't necessarily mean lower energy consumption.

What do you expect of the new Parliament?

We do not expect this Parliament to be any less ambitious than the previous one. Micropower Europe supports all the parliamentary amendments made to the Energy Performance in Buildings Directive. We urge the Council led by the Swedish Presidency to maintain this high level of ambition, reflecting the urgency of cli-

mate change and the need to tackle energy usage in buildings.

What are your messages to member states and the Presidency?

A highly ambitious RES directive was achieved under the French Presidency. With Sweden, an exemplary country on energy efficiency at the helm, it has to be possible to maintain if not the letter then the spirit of the Parliament's position on EPBD. We particularly warn the Council against watering down the complete abolition of the 1,000 square metre threshold to only a reduction to 250. The Commission's own data show that the abolition of the 1,000 square metre threshold will stimulate an investment of €8 billion per year, generating an annual return of €25 billion in lower energy bills.

Isn't it difficult to ask for investment during a recession?

As an example, two of our members – Mitsubishi and WhisperTech – are currently opening manufacturing facilities in Europe for heat pumps and microCHP. They are creating 'green' jobs and products in the midst of a recession in Spain and the UK. By supporting microgeneration, the EU not only very quickly moves to the 20-20-20 goals, but also helps speed up economic recovery, whilst equipping economies with skills and know how for the future.

Are you happy about how member states subsidise various energies?

Let's take just one example: Greece has an agreeable climate well-suited to solar heating. It does not subsidise solar panels but it does subsidise electric heating through reduced rate VAT on electricity. That's wrong. Member states' subsidising conventional energy use through reduced rate VAT is leading to environmentally disastrous over-consumption. If this were scrapped in those 14 member states concerned, energy consumption would drop by 1% across all 27 member states. This would not cost a single eurocent to implement. We're grateful that the issue of VAT is being revisited in the ongoing energy efficiency action plan consultation and that Parliament wants to address it through the EPBD. ■