

Green Transport - The Next Step in Europe's Climate Strategy

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Reviewing and improving its climate protection strategy will be one of the main challenges facing Europe over the next couple of months. Generating new ideas and ensuring adequate preparation are essential before the world resumes negotiations in Mexico. During her hearing in the European Parliament's Environment Committee, the new Commissioner for Climate Action, Connie Hedegaard, has made one thing very clear: Transport will be the focus of the next legislative package, which will be drafted by the

Commission by the end of this year. But, why, one might ask, will the Commission be looking more at transport?

The answer to this question turns out to be quite simple: While overall emissions in the European Union dropped slightly during the last two decades, transport emissions have reached an all-time high. With a rise of 26% since 1990 and a share of 19% in Europe's overall emissions, transport has become an increasingly relevant factor for the success or failure of EU climate policies.

Despite its environmental impact and the recognition of the need to cut down on transport emissions, reducing them is not an easy task for policymakers. This is because, on the one hand, individualised mobility has become a symbol of wealth and success in modern societies; and on the other hand, because globalisation and international trade have resulted in a substantial increase in freight transport around the globe. Both aspects play a key role in the tremendous increase in emissions over the last decades.

The European Union has to respond to these developments in the transport sector for several reasons. First, representing the model for a sustainable growth path in the world creates a responsibility for finding solutions to the problem of how to best organise clean mobility. As an exporter of cars, trains, ships and aircrafts, this is also an economic opportunity for the EU. On the other hand, we have to set incentives in order to switch from oil to other sources of energy such as electricity, hydrogen or organic fuels for transportation. We should do so not only for environmental reasons. Instead, we should end our over-dependence on oil altogether in order to protect our citizens from unexpected and sharp increases in the price of oil, global competition for the last oil reserves, and global 'peak oil', which would leave us without any viable alternatives.

In order to force Europe to make its transport structure 'greener', the Commission started with an emission performance regulation for cars in 2008, which was agreed by the Council and the Parliament last year. This was a first step to guide the industry in the right direction, but it will take years for the limit of 120 grams per kilometre to become the average of Europe's car fleet. Therefore we have to continue with measures on the demand side as well. The full internalisation of external costs could, for example, be conducted along the lines of an EU carbon tax on fossil fuels.

Furthermore, we have to take a look at infrastructure. For many people, buying an electric car today is still not an alternative, because of missing recharging points. More

generally, using public transportation instead of a car is highly complicated in many regions of Europe because of missing infrastructure and a lack of smart solutions for organising equal access to common goods. We have to look at how to improve public services in order to offer mobility alternatives to individual transportation.

Finally, let's come back to Copenhagen and the international negotiations. Making transport 'greener' is not only a European topic. International aviation and maritime transport have been forgotten on the international agenda for many years. Both sectors have contributed to global warming without being affected by international environmental policies so far. Making transportation 'greener' might also give the EU a good reason to force international negotiations to limit emissions in the air and on sea.

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