

Former EPBD Rapporteur Bendtsen:

"To be a success, the Renovation Wave must involve ordinary citizens and be market friendly"



This week marks the second anniversary of the publication of the revised Buildings Directive (EPBD), as well as the publication by the Commission of the Recovery Plan. We sat down with Bendt BENDTSEN, former Rapporteur on the EPBD, to discuss achievements on the EPBD and the outlook for energy efficient buildings policy at EU and national levels. Bendt BENDTSEN was Rapporteur on the EPBD revision in 2017-2018 and is a former Minister for Economic Affairs of Denmark. He now serves as the Chairman of the Board of Synergi, an interest organisation that works towards a smarter and more efficient use of energy in Denmark.

The deadline for the transposition of the revised EPBD passed on the 10th March this year. On or before that date the Member States were required to submit their long-term renovation strategies, yet, even today, only about 5 Member States have submitted their final long-term renovation strategies. What are your thoughts on this matter? Are you worried?

I think it is equally worrying and embarrassing. It is worrying because we cannot afford to wait – the poor state of our buildings adversely affects the climate and public health across Europe. This is also deeply embarrassing, especially given that the Member States have voluntarily agreed to ratify the EPBD. There is a word in Danish and German called ‘*slendrian*’ which refers to a slow, careless, and ineffective way of working. Unfortunately, this is the best word I can think of to describe the situation. With their Green Deal, the Commission has promised to rigorously enforce the legislation related to the energy performance of buildings, starting with the assessment of the Member States’ long-term renovation strategies. I hope they stay true to their promise.

Of the new provisions in the revised EPBD, which one are you most proud of and why?

There were a lot of good provisions in the revised EPBD. The one that I am the proudest of, however, is that we got the Member States to commit to creating long-term renovation strategies. Generally speaking, the EU ought to work harder to make common Europeans feel part of the European project – and the long-term renovation strategies is a great chance to create real change in the lives of millions of Europeans that deserve green and healthy buildings. It is truly alarming that so few Member States have submitted their final long-term renovation strategies.

In a related policy development, the European Green Deal contains a commitment by the European Commission that it will launch a Renovation Wave via a Strategic Communication in September of this year. What do you expect from it, what would you like to see and how would the Renovation Wave fit with the revised EPBD?

Commissioner Simson has said that the aim of the Renovation Wave is to stimulate a faster pace of building renovation across the EU by minimising regulatory barriers. This is a noble ambition, but we should not get ahead of ourselves. With Member States already struggling to deliver on existing EU directives such as the EPBD, there is still a long way towards achieving the kind of renovation rates that we need. If the Renovation Wave is to become a success, the Commission must find a way of getting ordinary Europeans involved. If we want national governments to deliver on EU policies, these policies must appeal to the citizens of the EU Member States. One way of ensuring this will be to talk in terms that people can relate to. The Renovation Wave should not just be another piece of complicated policy filled with highly technical

engineering-, financial- or legal terminology. Instead, it should aim to actively inform people of how the renovation of our buildings affect our daily lives, our children's upbringing, and the health of everyone – be it our colleagues, friends, or immediate family.

What is your reaction regarding the Recovery Action Plan / Recovery Fund proposed by the European Commission and the emphasis put on building renovation? Is it enough? Does it contain the necessary measures to boost renovation in Europe?

Overall, I think the emphasis on building renovation as part of the Recovery Action Plan looks very promising. Although we still do not know the final details, the Commission has made it clear that the Renovation Wave is to play a key role in the EU's economic recovery. Renovation is a labour-intensive sector, and so investments will have an immediate impact on employment numbers while also contributing positively to the green transition. Again, the most important thing is to make the European people feel like they are personally part of the recovery. The best way of doing this is by creating an environment in which businesses of all sizes can thrive so that people can get their jobs back. To this end, I would have liked to see the Recovery Action Plan also focusing on energy efficiency initiatives in industry – an area that was also strangely absent from the European Green Deal. A lot of industrial buildings across Europe need renovation for environmental reasons, and greater energy efficiency would give them an economic advantage on the world market.

Finally, what are your hopes for your home country, Denmark? The national target of reducing carbon emissions by 70% by 2030 is eye-catching and feels like the right level of ambition to observers in Brussels. Your Prime Minister announced at the beginning of May that 30 billion DKK will be directed to building renovation. Could other countries learn from the Danish approach and experience?

Denmark's target of a 70% emissions reduction by 2030 is very promising, and I think it is precisely the kind of ambition that the world needs. That said, we are still waiting for the Danish government to deliver its final strategy of how to achieve its target. In the autumn of 2019, the government entered into 13 'climate partnerships' with a number of leading Danish companies. Over the course of several months, these companies worked to produce sector specific climate recommendations to the government – including ones for the construction sector. Sadly, the submission of the recommendations clashed with the onset of the corona crisis so we have yet to see if the Danish government will follow the advice of the climate partnerships. I hope they will. It is key that we make the green transition business and market friendly if we want to inspire the rest of the world.

While the new 30 billion DKK housing agreement that you are referring to is excellent, it is mainly concerned with social housing. We still need more ambitious policies for energy efficiency in public buildings and in the industry. I wish that Denmark would adopt a binding, national target for energy efficiency, and that we would follow the EU's lead in applying the "energy efficiency first" principle to our climate- and energy policies. In short, Denmark is on the right track, but we need to do even more, especially on the energy efficiency agenda!



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For further information

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About EuroACE

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EuroACE Members (2020)

