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European Renewable Energies Federation

Welcome Speech by Dr. Nikos Vassilakos, President of EREF, European Renewable Energies Federation, during the New Year's Reception of EREF in the European Parliament on January 27 2009

Dear friends, good evening.

On behalf of the European Renewable Energies Federation, its Governing Board, its National Member Associations and companies, its Managing Director, Dörte Fouquet, and our Brussels Office, I would like to extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to our New Year's Reception, which takes place here in the European Parliament, with the generous support of our member company SCHOTT.

This New Year's Reception allows us to celebrate together the beginning of a very interesting year ahead of us, full of hopes, challenges and risks, and, also, to reflect back on an eventful, at times maddening and full of tensions and conflicts, 2008.

If somebody wants to describe the meaning of crescendo and drama in an opera, he could well use the work and discussions, for more than one-and-a-half year, towards the breathtaking final, which was the decision of the European Union, that is the European Commission, the Member States/Council and the European Parliament, for its climate and energy package, and, in particular, for the new Directive on the promotion of renewable energy.

When it all started in concrete terms in late summer 2007, I would not have bet that we would achieve such a progress, and that we would have by now a truly positive, overall, and solid RES Directive. Quite the opposite ! It was a and tortuous long process of reflection, of pushing, of sailing close-hauled, of conviction and misjudgement, misunderstandings, frustration, reconciliation, hope and, finally, joy. Drama directors can learn from us all !

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There is never a single winner or a single loser in an honest, constructive, fight over arguments and directions. EREF is happy with most of the outcome. Sure, we still do not understand why Member States that agreed (sometimes, yes, with difficulty !) on binding national targets by 2020, could not agree on being called up for responsibility in delivering those targets, from day one.

We now have a Directive defining action in the time horizon until 2020. Why we need to review this Directive just 3 or 4 years after it has actually commenced application, is something we cannot really understand.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of Member States and the European Parliament have made it very clear that there is no way they will push for risky and volatile support mechanisms and trade structures, which nobody really wants apart from some centralised power suppliers and traders.

In my opinion, we also have another very important positive outcome from the entire process towards the Directive, and that is the quality, knowledge and understanding of the vast potential of renewables, in relation to the broader picture of the energy and climate policy. This newly-strengthened knowledge and conviction spreads now across Members of Parliament of all political groups and all regions of Europe, across the Member States themselves, and, even, local-level administrations which got involved in this discussion, as well as across the European Council, which really fought hard, with strong arguments, for the best possible compromise.

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The broadening and deepening discussions around the Directive, on many levels and in various intensive ways, showed clearly that renewable energy is no longer a nice-to-have niche application, but is embedded in the core administrative decision structures, in various State policy mechanisms and is fast gaining support, especially in times of economic turmoil, as a carrier of hope for the population in Europe and as a powerful tool for boosting investment and employment, to help us get out of the current crisis.

Seeing the depressing conflict over gas supplies from Russia via Ukraine during these days and the cold-weather suffering experienced by the people especially in countries of Eastern Europe, it is clear that in those countries, too, renewable energies have to be taken seriously into account, as an important security of supply option.

This year, we at EREF are fully prepared and ready to support the Commission and the Member States, so that realistic viable and truly effective National Action Plans on renewables are set up, and are thoroughly discussed with the major stakeholders.

EREF will focus on the concrete issues of grid extension, smart grid and metering technologies, as well as storage capacities for Renewable Energies. As a federation of producers of renewable energy from all sources, we will watch carefully, so that the new trend to install big renewable-production installations in non-EU countries, such as those around the Mediterranean, does not dilute or jeopardise the efforts of Member States themselves, to increase home-made renewable energy production in their own territories, and to encourage especially independent power production.

EREF will also work diligently on other key issues, such as the greening of housing and the integrated use of intelligent micro-solutions for renewables coupled with insulation and efficiency measures, both for old and for new buildings.

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It is my pleasure that we can again use our New Year's Reception to present our new EREF European RES Price Report. We have a small handout here for distribution and you can download the full report from our web page.

At this point, it is my pleasure to acknowledge and give my warmest regards and thanks to all those who made the Directive happen, and especially to thank our Rapporteur Claude Turmes for his incessant work and constructive mind, who never lost track on any important subject, who clearly evaluated the pros and cons of the hundreds of amendments submitted, and who steered all political groups in the Parliament towards a courageous decision. Claude ensured that the voice of renewables is heard, loud and clear, in the negotiations and he was and, always, is a strong ally for independent power production and for a critical review of the oligopolistic structures of our energy markets. Claude, you are not alone, many thanks to you and your entire team and to so many other wonderful Members of Parliament !

On another important note, I know that Mechtild Rothe decided not to run again for the European Parliament. We are all going to miss her, and we should all applaud her for having supported and promoted wholeheartedly the case for renewables throughout her distinguished career in the Parliament. She is certainly a Doyen of Renewables in Europe ! Mechtild could not be here tonight, but she sends us all her best wishes.

Dear friends,

Again, many thanks to all of you who made it happen, in the Commission, in the Council, in the European Parliament, everywhere in Europe ! Last, but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to, again, express our many thanks to our member Schott, for its generous support that makes this joyous EREF evening possible.

Enjoy the evening !