

An attempt to reach a deal on new energy efficiency rules for the European Union fell apart on Wednesday night as representatives of the European Parliament and Council were unable to reach a compromise on targets.

The European Commission has proposed a 30% binding target for energy savings in member states by 2030. The target would be met by implementing energy efficiency measures.

The European Parliament wants a higher target. But EU member states want to weaken the Commission proposal, making the target non-binding.

The two institutions have been negotiating for weeks, but a fifth negotiating round last night, intended to be the last, had to be abandoned after Bulgaria, which holds the rotating presidency of the Council of 28 national EU governments, said it could not agree to what MEPs were offering.

Talks were halted and negotiators moved on to the Renewable Energy Directive file, on which an agreement was reached 11 hours later at 4am.

Centre-left Czech MEP Miroslav Poche, leading negotiations on behalf of the parliament, made significant concessions in this round of talks. He conceded to his counterpart Zhecho Stankov, Bulgaria's deputy energy minister, that the Parliament would accept a non-binding target - but only if the target was significantly raised.

Poche offered a 33% non-binding headline target, with a 0.85 annual savings target, to be met with primary and/or final energy consumption.

However Stankov said it was not in the mandate given to him by member states to agree to this.

"The parliament yesterday dropped the binding nature of the target, we accepted that it's a red line for the Council," Hungarian Green MEP Benedek Jávor, a shadow rapporteur on the file, told Euractiv.

"The parliament made a package offer which included the primary 'and/or' final approach, instead of the primary 'and' approach which is preferred by the Parliament. The price for that was a higher headline target and an annual saving target."

"Minister Stankov said quite clearly he has no more mandate and he's already at the edge or slightly beyond his original mandate," he said. "He seemed to be quite honest on that. Still I had information from the Council that on some issues perhaps the red line was not so red. So it could be an orange line."

New governments

The mandate for Bulgaria to conduct the negotiations was agreed several months ago, before political earthquakes in Italy and Spain brought new populist and leftist

governments, respectively, into power.

These governments are far more ambitious on climate change than their predecessors. After interventions from the new governments at Monday's energy council in Luxembourg, it was thought that some of the 'red lines' in the old mandate may no longer apply.

However, the mandate itself has not been updated.

Whether or not the Council can accept the latest offer from MEPs - a target of 33% - may depend on Germany, which has also seen a new government take office since the mandate was agreed.

That government is made up of the same coalition as the previous term, but it is thought that the environment ministry in Berlin may now be more powerful.

Peter Altmaier, Germany's energy minister, gave few hints at the energy council as to what the country's position is.

Austrians await

It remains unclear whether a sixth round of negotiations can be scheduled in the next 15 days before the end of the Bulgarian presidency. A different set of negotiators will be meeting in Brussels next Tuesday to discuss a related file on energy governance, and it's possible that a last round of efficiency talks could take place after that.

However, given that the current positions of the 28 EU governments need to be clarified, Bulgaria would probably wait until after it has taken the pulse of energy ministries. This may be possible at an upcoming environment informal meeting taking place in Bulgaria. The details will have to be worked out between Poche and Stankov, but Jávör said MEPs think they are close enough to a deal that something could be agreed in the next two weeks. "At the end, the positions were not very far from each other," he said. "Just a small move from the Council and we can reach a deal. So I think it would make sense to make another attempt."

Bulgaria set a goal of completing the file during the presidency and is therefore keen to get it resolved before 1 July. However, if no deal can be reached, the file will be handed off to the Austrian presidency, which will be conducting negotiations on behalf of member states from that date.

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