

Time to scrap ETS in favour of effective climate measures

by europeanvoice.com
Thursday, 21 February 2013

Calls for the European Union to scrap the ETS.

Wendel Trio and Bernadette Segol last week called for support of ‘backloading’ and subsequent structural reform of the failing emissions-trading system (ETS) (‘Turning point for ETS’, 14-20 February).

Their article puts all dissenting voices into one category, but nothing could be further from reality. Last Monday (18 February), more than 90 organisations, movements and networks from around the world launched a declaration calling on the EU to scrap the ETS. The reasons differ fundamentally from those of climate change-deniers in the European Parliament or energy-intensive industries. The signatories want effective and fair climate regulation both in the EU and internationally. The ETS in the EU is preventing that from happening. It has fed the illusion that a market-based instrument focused on pricing can trigger the changes needed to transform our energy infrastructure and the way our economies produce and consume goods. No such change has ever been brought about by a trading instrument.

Let us not be deceived. Industrial bodies that back the reform of the ETS – such as Shell, Statoil, the Carbon Capture and Storage Association, E.On and Électricité de France – profit from fossil fuels: some of them made millions from carbon trading. They do not want meaningful cuts in emissions at source, or structural changes that would bring an end to industrial use of fossil fuels.

Trio and Segol claim that ‘none of the voices speaking out against a short-term ETS fix has either offered alternatives or presented a vision of how the scheme should be reformed’. The very existence of the ETS has blocked discussion of real alternatives for more than seven years. Worse still, the ETS has actively weakened policies such as the energy efficiency directive and the large combustion plants directive and held back the expansion of feed-in tariff initiatives.

The signatories of ‘Time to Scrap the ETS’ are demanding stronger targets and policies for reducing emissions at source to enforce effectively the transformation of EU energy infrastructure and put an end to industrial use of fossil fuels. ‘The biggest threat to humanity of the 21st century’, as climate change is often described, will not be tackled with a market-dependent trading instrument that acts mainly as a subsidy for the big polluters. It will take a political battle and vigorous choices to navigate our societies towards an environmentally and socially sustainable future. We should not leave that to the industry or the markets.

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Co-initiators of the ‘Time to scrap the ETS’ campaign

source: <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/time-to-scrap-ets-in-favour-of-effective-climate-measures/76482.aspx>