Energy Union strategy offers scope for cooling technology as it emphasises building efficiency

26 February 2015 | By Andrew Gaved

Industry groups EPEE and EHPA welcome the potential for cooling and heat pumps to play a significant role the wide-reaching and ambitious energy strategy

The European Commission has published its strategy framework for an Energy Union, containing 15 different recommendations to consolidate energy supply and to reduce energy use and related carbon emissions throughout Europe.

A key element of the framework is to focus on energy efficient buildings and to prioritise research and innovation into low-carbon, low-energy technology – two moves which will offer major scope for cooling and heating.

Industry associations Epe and the European Heat Pump Association to welcome the document and to underline the potential that the strategy offers to the cooling and heating sectors. The EHPA stressed the importance of heat pumps in producing low carbon cooling and heating – a technology that was disappointingly not highlighted in the document’s recommendations for increased renewable energy sources.

The Energy Union document is a wide-ranging and ambitious strategy with high caching aims. The introduction says:

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Our vision is of an integrated continent-wide energy system where energy flows freely across borders, based on competition and the best possible use of resources, and with effective regulation of energy markets at EU level where necessary. Our vision is of the Energy Union as a sustainable, low-carbon and climate-friendly economy that is designed to last; our vision is of strong, innovative and competitive European companies that develop the industrial products and technology needed to deliver energy efficiency and low carbon technologies inside and outside Europe. Our vision is of a European labour force with the skills to build and manage the energy system of tomorrow.

Behind these ‘visions’ lay 15 detailed strategy proposals designed to move forward pan-European co-operation on energy policy, combined with a move away from fossil fuels. The significant strategic development for the cooling and heating industries in Europe is the enshrining of energy efficiency as a contributor to reduced energy demand. To achieve the EU’s target of a 27 per cent improvement in energy efficiency will require a fundamental shake-up of its strategy relating to buildings, the Commission believes.

The strategy says: “Heating and cooling is the largest single source of energy demand in Europe and the majority of Europe’s gas imports are used for these purposes. Huge efficiency gains remain to be captured with regard to district heating and cooling, which will be addressed in a Commission strategy.”

But beyond pump-priming district heating and cooling, the strategy envisages much more focus on improving building efficiency, with help for financing and technology research.

In its summary of the key points, it says: “Buildings have huge potential for energy efficiency gains. Retrofitting existing buildings to make them energy efficient and making full use of sustainable space heating and cooling will reduce the EU’s energy import bills, reinforce energy security and cut energy costs for households and businesses. The Commission will propose a strategy to facilitate investment in heating and cooling.”

Key to this are an integrated energy market (seeking to consolidate the current 28 national energy frameworks); improved security of supply, with a move away from oil towards gas, nuclear and renewables; and improved conditions for energy consumers.
The European Heat Pump Association sought to put the EC’s omission of heat pumps right, in the position paper it released shortly afterwards:

“The Energy Union should give primary consideration to secure, efficient, sustainable and comprehensive solutions for heating. These solutions are already available in the short and the medium term and can help meeting the objectives of the Energy Union (sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness). They should be considered, promoted and even prioritised over other policy measures. The EHPA believes that not only Member States, but also local authorities of European cities and rural areas and consumers can play a key role in reaching the objectives of the Energy Union through the modernisation of the heating and cooling systems in buildings... EHPA also points out the potential of heating and cooling solutions in the industrial sector. Heat pump solutions fulfil all the objectives of the Energy Union (sustainability, competitiveness, and security of supply).”

The final part of the equation is research and the Commission outlines four core priorities for this:

- Being the world leader in developing the next generation of renewable energy technologies, including environment-friendly production and use of biomass and biofuels, together with energy storage;

- Facilitating the participation of consumers in the energy transition through smart grids, smart home appliances, smart cities, and home automation systems;

- Efficient energy systems, and harnessing technology to make the building stock energy neutral;

- More sustainable transport systems that develop and deploy at large scale innovative technologies and services to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Industry supplier body EPEE (European Partnership for Energy and the Environment) said it saw the aims as promoting low-carbon cooling and heating. It said: “EPEE welcomes the focus on energy efficiency as a “first fuel” and in particular the prioritisation of the buildings sector where there is a huge saving potential. We support the European Commission’s plan to put a stronger policy focus on the heating, cooling and refrigeration sector.”
Industry supplier body EPEE (European Partnership for Energy and the Environment) said it saw the aims as promoting low-carbon cooling and heating. It said: “EPEE welcomes the focus on energy efficiency as a “first fuel” and in particular the prioritisation of the buildings sector where there is a huge saving potential. We support the European Commission’s plan to put a stronger policy focus on the heating, cooling and refrigeration applications in buildings. These applications constitute a major part of the energy consumption as well as direct electricity consumption and may therefore contribute enormously to energy savings in the buildings sector.”

It added: “The heating, cooling and refrigeration industry helps deliver energy efficiency and low carbon innovative technologies. In addition to putting energy efficient products on the market today, we also continually develop innovative and environmentally-sound solutions and energy efficient technologies such as refrigeration systems, air-conditioning equipment and heat pumps. Our sector is playing its part in helping the EU meet its ambitious climate and energy objectives and is also committed to playing a leading role at the global level.”