

Energy consumption in new buildings can be halved and in older buildings, it can be reduced by 20 percent. The solution to the climate issue may lie here. A proposal at the European Union level for a "billions for the environment" package tackles both the climate problem and the need for new jobs. Why is the proposal not even mentioned in the Swedish government's climate motion?

Tackle greenhouse effect in construction!

The Persson government has now presented its motion on the climate.

The light points in the debate surrounding the motion are unfortunately overshadowed by two dark clouds. In part, the focus of the debate on the relatively small differences of opinion that exist and, in part, suggestions that industry would resist efforts aimed at reducing emissions of greenhouse gases.

We should all begin to think innovatively to identify new solutions, rather than focusing on artificial differences of opinion. The interests of society in saving the environment and those of industry in making money coincide; in both cases, increased efficiency and saving resources are central concerns.

The climate motion includes many suggestions worth taking advantage of, including the proposal that the use of fossil fuels in the heating of homes and offices be reduced.

Expectations ought not end at this modest, although wise, measure. Here, an enormous savings potential exists, perhaps even the very key to the solution of the climate problem.

It is therefore surprising that the proposal by the European Commission regarding directives on the energy performance of buildings has not even been mentioned in the motion.

It is estimated that buildings and their consumption represent more than 40 percent of energy use within the European Union. This means that buildings, in contrast to popular belief, contribute more greenhouse gases than traffic (31 percent) and industry (28 percent).

It should be stressed that the greatest environmental effect of a building does not occur during its construction, but later, during the lifetime of the building, through heating, cooling, hot water, lighting, and so forth.

A large amount of this energy use is unnecessary. Using modern technology, it is now possible to reduce the ongoing energy needs of buildings substantially.

Through renovations, Skanska is able to reduce the annual energy consumption of the average Stockholm office building from 145 kWh per square meter to 115. In new

construction developments, we are able to reduce this figure to about 80 kWh per square meter.

We are thus talking about increases in energy efficiency of approximately 20 percent in existing buildings and close to 50 percent in new ones. Our figures are confirmed by calculations similar to those from the European Commission.

The European Commission's proposal for a directive on more efficient energy use in buildings is, in part, be a matter of establishing integrated minimum standards for energy performance for each type of building and developing systems for energy certification for all buildings within the EU.

The idea is that all buildings sold within the EU should be accompanied by an energy declaration that allows the purchaser to evaluate both energy costs and the possibilities for implementing energy-saving measures.

Europe and the construction industry should take the lead in the global fight against the threat to our climate. The emissions of greenhouse gases by the construction industry could, over 10 to 20 years, be reduced by between 20 and 25 percent.

In total, emissions from Europe's 160 million hotels, stores, industrial buildings, office buildings and homes, could be reduced by 450 million tons of greenhouse gases per year, that is, 12 percent of all emissions.

Perhaps we already have the tools necessary to solve the climate problem, which is certainly an encouraging perspective! Additionally, this would provide job opportunities and decreased dependency on the outside world.

A "billions for the environment" would rapidly create 3.4 million (!) new jobs within the European Union. This would also help many small businesses and naturally boost export opportunities for energy saving technologies.

When it comes to dependency on the outside world, the European Union already imports 50 percent of the energy it uses. If current developments continue, that share will have increased to 70 percent by 2030.

There is no time to lose in the job at hand. The task is an arduous one and of such dimensions that we must all be prepared to test innovative solutions if we are to succeed.

The key concept is coordination between the public and private sectors.

A fine example is the expertise center being established in Silverdal, outside Stockholm, where Skanska, in cooperation with the Swedish Environmental Research Institute, the Swedish National Testing and Research Institute and the Royal Institute of Technology, is establishing an international expertise center on developed environments.

And in the US, we are developing collaboration with the US Environmental Protection Agency, on a voluntary environmental seal, the “Energy Star,” for buildings.

In the spring of 2002, the content in the climate motion is to lead to a decision by the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag. This will serve as an important message that will be decisive in whether or not Sweden plays an active role in accelerating the pace in the fight against the threat to our climate.

The necessary know-how, technology and will are already in the market. However, to speed developments, regulations and incentives from legislators are necessary.

The players in the market must be stimulated to think in a life-cycle perspective and to view investments and operations in context.

Within the European Union, this is not only a matter for the current 15 member states but also the 10 countries that are expected to join. Some of these have previously had political systems that have ruthlessly destroyed the environment and mismanaged natural resources.

In the European Union too, political and industrial leaders must develop new forms of collaboration. Otherwise, we see an evident risk that the results will not come close to the ambitious targets that have been set. This would result in decreased confidence in the European Union and the sidelining of the environment.

Successful cooperation on the issue of the climate and efficient energy use would, on the other hand, reinforce our industry and its competitiveness.

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