



## How cutting methane emissions quickly can slow global warming



28 September 2021, 13:00 – 15:00 CEST

Online Event

### Hosted by MEP Maria Spyraiki (EPP)

Co-Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'

#### Speakers:

- **MEP Maria Spyraiki (EPP)**
- **Dr. Ilissa Ocko**, Senior Climate Scientist, Barbra Streisand Chair of Environmental Studies, EDF
- **Kitti Nyitrai**, Head of Unit C2 on 'Decarbonization and sustainability of energy sources', DG ENER, European Commission
- **Gunārs Anšņs (LV/RE)**, Major of Liepāja City and Rapporteur on the EU strategy to reduce methane emissions, Committee of the Regions (CoR)
- **Alessia Virone**, Government Affairs Manager, Clean Air Task Force (CATF)
- **MEP Jutta Paulus (Greens/EFA)**
- **Manfredi Caltagirone**, Head a.i., United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) International Methane Emissions Observatory
- **Christophe McGlade**, Head of Energy Supply Unit, International Energy Agency
- **MEP Marcos Ros Sempere (S&D)**
- **MEP Asger Christensen (Renew Europe)**

## Welcome Remarks

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*MEP Maria Spyraiki*

***“By reducing methane emissions, we can get a quick win for protecting our people, our citizens and our environment.”***

To begin the event, MEP Maria Spyraiki explained the seriousness of the current climate situation by pointing to the forest fires and floods that characterized this 2021 summer. Ms. Spyraiki then highlighted that the **Methane Reduction Strategy**, adopted in ENVI Committee a few hours before the event, **is a step in the right direction**. However, the MEP stressed, more needs to be done. **Methane reduction should be addressed at the COP26** to boost the global methane reduction alliance, to **significantly reduce methane emissions in the oil and gas sector by 2030**. Since methane is the second biggest polluter, Ms. Spyraiki continued, it is imperative to work together, **internationally and bilaterally, to reach a global agreement**. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of **the establishment of an independent international methane observatory**, combined with a strong **methane leak detection program**. Ms. Spyraiki wants **to incentivize industries to reduce their methane emissions and encourage innovation beneficial to the cost-effectiveness of reducing methane emissions**, within the frameworks of the Common Agricultural Programme (CAP). Lastly, Ms. Spyraiki underlined that, concerning waste, the EU should continue to **tackle unlawful practices and increase the implementation of existing legislation**. She ended her opening statement by claiming that reducing methane emissions now will avoid nearly 0.3 Celsius warming by 2045. Concludingly, she stressed that it is time to act now.

Presentation of the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) “Cutting Methane Emissions Quickly Could Slow Climate Warming Rate by 30%” study

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*Dr. Ilissa Ocko, Senior Climate Scientist, Barbra Streisand Chair of Environmental Studies, EDF*

***“By applying methane reduction strategies already available today, we can half our global methane emissions. This will slow down the degree of global warming by 30%.”***

In her presentation, Dr. Ilissa Ocko explained how cutting methane emissions quickly can slow global warming. **Methane contributes to 28% of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** that lead to global warming. After CO<sub>2</sub> (43%), it is the biggest polluting GHG. Contrary to CO<sub>2</sub>, Dr. Ocko explained, **methane is a short-lived GHG**. Meaning, the methane in the atmosphere now is the result of, mostly human practices, of the last decade. Therefore, **reducing methane emissions can book quick** results, especially compared to reducing CO<sub>2</sub>. Dr. Ocko assured that there are numerable strategies available today that would significantly reduce methane emissions, many of which are affordable. In **agriculture**, there are **ways to manage livestock differently**, which would reduce methane emissions. In the **energy** sector, methane is most common in natural gas. Methane emissions can especially occur when it is moved around, in a pipeline for example. Thus, by **identifying and fixing leaks**, a significant share of methane emissions in this industry can be prevented. Also concerning **waste**, there are numerous opportunities to **catch emissions from landfills**. Dr. Ocko mentioned that techniques to **improve wastewater treatment** can help for example. Adding all these potentials, she stressed, would **reduce methane emissions in half**. To showcase how important the energy sector is, over **40% of these reductions would come from leak detection and repair**. **Halving methane emissions, she continued, slow down the degree of global warming by 30%**. Additionally, it would have tremendous beneficial side effects. It will, among others, **prevent up to 200 thousand premature deaths worldwide** and **prevent 25 million tons of crop losses**. Thus, Dr. Ocko concluded that we have an unparalleled opportunity to slow global warming considerably in the near term, with many other co-benefits.

## Panel 1 – The EU policy toolbox and how to leverage the latest technologies

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*Kitti Nyitrai, Head of Unit C2 on ‘Decarbonization and sustainability of energy sources’, DG ENER, European Commission*

***“We are working full steam on the drafting of legislative proposals and we are looking forward to continuing the cooperation with the parliament and other stakeholders.”***

During her speech, Ms. Kitti Nyitrai focused on what the EU is doing and will do in the sectors of waste, agriculture and energy concerning methane emissions reduction. In the **waste sector**, Nyitrai explained, **the EU has already been quite active**. The average methane

emissions are lower than the global average, thanks to the existing EU legislation. The Commission will now focus on **making sure the existing legislation is properly implemented**. **In the agriculture sector**, one of the biggest sectors concerning emissions, **the methane emissions are rather diffused**, which makes monitoring difficult. However, Ms. Nyitrai stressed that there are many good practices to reduce methane emissions. She pointed to the example of **the use of Biogas to reduce the methane intensity in the agriculture sector**. **In the Energy sector, the EU is lacking behind**, according to Ms. Nyitrai. However, since the oil and gas sector has the highest potential to reduce or abate emissions, **the Commission is currently working on legislation. This legislation will be based on three pillars**, she elaborated. Firstly, the Commission strived to get **reliable data to ensure emissions are targeted with specific effective measures**. Secondly, the Commission strives to **implement so-called 'no regret measures'**. These are measures that can already be implemented, for example, **legislation on leak detection and repair**. Thirdly, the Commission will look into how **global methane emissions can be influenced by the EU**. Ms. Nyitrai highlighted that, in relation to global methane emissions, the Commission will **focus on diplomatic outreach and enhancing transparency**. Lastly, she explained that the Commission is also looking into addressing the emission from the fossil fuels consumed in the EU but produced elsewhere where the emissions occur.

*Gunārs Anšņš (LV/RE), Major of Liepāja City and Rapporteur on the EU strategy to reduce methane emissions, Committee of the Regions (CoR)*

***“The EU alone will not have a lot of influence – we need to look for global solutions.”***

Mr. Gunārs Anšņš mostly talked about the importance of the **global perspective**. Since the **EU only accounts for 5% of global methane emissions**, this problem needs to be solved globally, he stressed. Mr. Anšņš pointed that **the single market can play a vital role** in globally reducing methane emissions. **Companies that export to the EU should have the same standards as the EU holds internally**, he stressed. Moreover, he mentioned that the fact that oil and gas plants differ in countries can be considered a good thing. It shows that change can happen. He concluded by saying that **reducing methane emission should be strived for on all levels, local, regional, national and supranational**.

*Alessia Virone, Government Affairs Manager, Clean Air Task Force (CATF)*

***“Since methane emissions are short-lived in the atmosphere, a lot of results can be booked quickly by reducing methane emissions.”***

Ms. Alessia Virone started by expressing **the need to reduce methane emissions** to reach the EU’s climate targets. By doing so, she said, **some climate change effects will be prevented**, but equally as important, **the climate change process will be slowed down**. Especially for slowing down climate change, **reducing methane emissions is important she highlighted, due to the relatively short time it spends in the atmosphere**. According to Ms. Virone, **an effective regulation on methane emissions in the energy sector is needed, including a ban on unnecessary flaring and venting**. Moreover, **quarterly or monthly leak reparations will help cut methane emissions fast**, she stated. As other speakers highlighted too, Ms. Virone **urged the EU to focus on indirect emissions from imports**.

Panel 2 – The EU’s leverage to trigger global action: multilateralism and road to COP26

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*MEP Jutta Paulus (Greens/EFA)*

***“The question is not: can we afford to mitigate climate change? The question is: can we afford not to do it?”***

In her speech, MEP Ms. Jutta Paulus explained what she thinks the EU can be doing to reduce methane emissions. According to the Green MEP, **the EU needs to impose stronger requirements for production inside the EU and imports to the EU**. This, together with a **strong deadline for the industries**, will provoke action, she said. Moreover, the EU needs a **global strategy**. Ms. Paulus stated that the **Global Methane Pledge** is a good idea since it brings many countries on board. But its targets should at least be in line with the UN’s. A double approach is needed, she continued. **Countries and companies need to come together** to realize radical change. Ms. Paulus ended by remarking on **the EU’s relatively short climate perspective**. We must look further than 2100, and adjust our infrastructure accordingly.

*Manfredi Caltagirone, Head a.i., United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) International Methane Emissions Observatory*

***‘We need to integrate sources of data at high accuracy to sufficiently act to the scale of the climate crisis.’***

Concerning how the EU can further support data collection and global action, Mr. Caltagirone explained that **the EU can build on the Global Methane Pledge to renew international ambition**. It is time we act on CO<sub>2</sub> and methane, he stressed. Only **by focusing on both polluters, the 1.5-degree target of the Paris accord can be reached**. It is imperative to act fast, and for acting fast, **reliable data is needed**. Moreover, Mr. Caltagirone underlined that **the EU need to work with other consumer countries to set global standards** on methane emissions. Concludingly, he highlighted that the Commission, NGOs and other stakeholders should **integrate the different approaches available** to reduce methane emissions to increase emissions mitigation efficiency.

*Christophe McGlade, Head of Energy Supply Unit, International Energy Agency*

***“The recent policy and tech advantages are real courses for optimism. The time has come for Countries and companies to come together and tackle the methane emissions problem.”***

Mr. Christophe McGlade briefly introduced the **Net Zero Roadmap**, published by the International Energy Agency. This roadmap, he explained, shows how **the global energy sector can reach net zero emissions by 2050 - which necessitates a 75% reduction in methane emissions from the fossil fuel industry**. To realize the net-zero target, policies can be introduced to reduce the methane intensity of the oil and gas industries. Mr. McGlade, continuing on these policies, stressed that many measures already exist. According to him, **the EU can mandate leak detection and repair requirements, impose technology standards and ban non-emergency flaring and venting**. These are effective measures that can relatively easily be implemented, he explained. Moreover, Mr. McGlade argued that **a broader coalition of countries and companies need to come together**. The Global Methane Pledge is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done. He concluded assuringly by stating that **the**



recent policy and tech advantages are real courses for optimism. But the time has come for Countries and companies to come together and really tackle this problem

## Reactions from MEPs

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### *MEP Marcos Ros Sempere (S&D)*

***“The EU should continue to promote global action on methane emissions, especially during the COP26.”***

MEP Mr. Ros Sempere announced that, on the same morning of the event, the ENVI Committee of the European Parliament adopted a new report on the EU Strategy to reduce methane emissions. The report encompasses 22 compromise amendments and reflects the urgency to act, as reiterated by the last IPCC report. The report includes mandatory leak detection and repair programs for the full supply chain of the energy sector and a call to ban venting and flaring of methane emissions. Additionally, requirements for imports have been adopted, to promote detection, repair, and control of all methane leakages. The importance of the international observatory was highlighted, as it collects data on methane emissions to determine the specific measures to be taken. Furthermore, the report reinforces the significant role of sustainable biogas and the related importance of promoting separate waste collection. MEP Mr. Ros Sempere emphasized that the same commitment should be maintained also in future EU legislative work: while developing the next parts of the Fit for 55 package, the Commission should consider the whole supply chain and all relevant sectors. In conclusion, MEP Mr. Ros Sempere stressed the need for a global reduction of methane emissions and the role of the EU to promote global action, especially in view of the COP26.

### *MEP Asger Christensen (Renew Europe)*

***“We need to reduce the emissions, not the production [...] We can easily reduce emissions in our sector with new innovations.”***

During his allocution, MEP Mr. Asger Christensen emphasized the fact that only emissions need to be reduced, not production. Taking as an example the farming sector, he highlighted the role of innovation. There are indeed many positive signals and examples in the research

that can contribute to the toolbox required for reducing methane emissions. Moreover, MEP Mr. Christensen restated the **huge potential of biogas**. From his perspective, it is important to use organic matter and waste, to produce renewable energy.

## Q&A Session with the audience

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Questions from the audience provided Ms. Nyitrai the space for some comments in relation to the agricultural sector and biogas. She assured that the Parliament is following closely the Commission's work on the **integration of methane emissions in the CAP**. Depending on how the Commission's proposals combine together, **the production of biogas will be incentivized** in, but not limited to, the agricultural sector. She also mentioned how biogas can provide a good decarbonization option under the new **Renewable Energy Directive**, which sets new sectoral targets. Finally, Ms. Nyitrai informed the audience about **upcoming updates on rules for the gas market**, with the goal of facilitating decarbonization by allowing biogas to compete on an equal footing with fossil fuels. MEP Ms. Spyraiki added that it is vital to **provide support, knowledge, and technical assistance to farmers** to adopt new technologies, such as those that transform methane emissions into biogas. Answering a technical question on the sources of methane emissions from wastewater, Dr. Ocko underlined **the role of wastewater treatment centres** in preventing the release of methane emissions.

## Closing remarks

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***"We are trying to create a framework that is adaptable, realistic and ambitious in tackling climate change."***

### *MEP Maria Spyraiki (EPP)*

Following the insightful debate, MEP Ms. Spyraiki focused her final remarks on three main takeaways. First, following the novel report, the fact that a **consensus was reached** is a very important step forward and sends a clear message to the Plenary. Secondly, she reiterated the ambition of the report and declared the intention of **setting with it a scheme for a global**



**agreement.** The EU, while speeding up its efforts, must also act as a global leader. Finally, MEP Ms. Spyraiki urged the Commission to **soon set forward legislative proposals** to reduce methane emissions in all sectors, while taking into account different situations.