

Without strong German leadership, the adoption of an ambitious renewable energy policy across Europe will be impossible.

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*Debates are currently taking place over the EU's energy and climate targets for 2030. **Andrzej Ancygier** and **Kacper Szulecki** note that Germany has so far kept an unusually low profile in the talks, which is at odds with the country's active promotion of ambitious renewable energy and climate targets during its EU presidency in 2007. Using the case of Poland, which has so far shown reluctance to making the transition to renewable energy technology, as an example, they argue that there will be significant costs for both the German economy and European climate policy if the German government does not take a leading role over the issue.*



There is no doubt that without German trend-setting and the country's bold attitude European energy and climate policy would look very different. During the meeting of the European Council in late 2006, only two countries declared their readiness to accept binding renewable energy targets for 2020. A few months later, in March 2007, the Council led by Chancellor Merkel agreed on the **20-20-20 by 2020** targets that were later translated by the European Commission into a set of measures presented as part of the Energy and Climate Package.



The situation in the current debate over energy and climate policy couldn't be more different. During the meeting of the European Council in May 2013 all that the EU leaders were ready to agree to was a statement that energy should be secure, affordable and produced in a sustainable manner: goals which could hardly be independently measured. At a press conference held afterwards, Angela Merkel stated that the EU should adopt an ambitious target concerning the level of CO₂ emissions but failed to provide any numbers.

The unwillingness to define any exact figures concerning the reduction of CO₂ emissions by 2030 at this early stage of the discussion may be treated as diplomatic caution: setting a target that may later be ignored by other leaders would significantly weaken the position of the German "Iron Lady" in other policy areas. But by failing to stress the need to have separate goals also for energy efficiency and the share of renewable energy in the energy mix by 2030, the German Chancellor might have contributed to a 'nuclear renaissance' in some EU countries.

One such country is Poland. With almost 90 per cent of electricity and two thirds of energy coming from coal, renewable sources are still playing a relatively small role in the country's energy mix. Had it been for the Prime Minister Donald Tusk to decide, it would have stayed this way. In March 2013, Mr. Tusk declared that Poland would fulfil its 15 per cent renewable energy target by 2020 and "nothing



Wind turbine near Grieben, Germany (Credit: Johannes Homuth, CC-BY-SA-3.0)

more". Instead, the Polish government would prefer to lower Polish CO₂ emissions by investing in nuclear energy and energy efficiency. According to Hanna Trojanowska, the government's representative for the nuclear programme, the construction of a nuclear power plant in Poland is necessary to fulfil the EU's CO₂ emissions reduction targets in the future.

A change of government will not bring much that is new to this direction of energy policy. The opposition Law and Justice Party, currently leading in the polls, would most likely make the situation of renewable energy systems investors even worse. The only renewable source of energy that the members of this party seem to support is geothermal energy. Other renewable energy systems are viewed with varying degrees of suspicion. In 2011 some members of the party proposed a bill that would require operators of wind energy turbines to remove all installations which are closer than 3,000 meters to the nearest households. At the same time, in 2007 the leader of the party declared a strong support for the development of nuclear energy in Poland.

Taking a closer look at Polish energy policy it becomes clear that little would happen in the area of renewable energy without pressure from Brussels. But mere pressure, without learning from positive examples, may no longer be enough. Poland now faces penalties over non-implementation of the EU Renewable Energy Directive. The country's recent adoption of a temporary bill (dubbed the 'small energy three-pack') is only a smoke screen, as a [legal analysis](#) conducted by lawyers from ClientEarth shows.

At the same time, the benefits of dispersed and decentralised sources of energy are increasingly appreciated at the local level. According to the preliminary results of a survey conducted within the framework of the Dahrendorf Symposium 2013, support for the development of renewable sources of energy at the local level is much higher than it is in government or parliament. As opposed to the major political parties, only a minority of participants support the construction of nuclear power plants in Poland. Unfortunately, due to close links between the large energy companies and the government it is rather improbable that the increased popularity of renewable sources at the local level will have an impact on the preferences of the country's political elites. They continue to strongly support the development of nuclear energy and shale gas, although it is now clear that Poland cannot afford to develop both at the same time.

In this situation the change may only come from the European level. But without strong German leadership – both in negotiations and as a model for other countries to follow – the adoption of an ambitious renewable energy policy will be impossible. Failure to set a separate target for the share of energy from renewable sources in the energy mix for 2030 will also have significant consequences for the German *Energiewende*. It would be a blow to the now almost 400,000 jobs in the renewable energy sector and have a negative impact on German exports connected to renewable energy. If some countries do indeed decide to give up the development of renewable energy and focus on investing in inflexible nuclear energy, it will become more and more difficult to accommodate an increasing share of intermittent renewable energy in the common European market. And this could put the entire long-term goal of a low-emission and low-carbon Europe at risk.

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