

THE GERMAN ENERGY TRANSITION (ENERGIEWENDE): ORIGINS, CURRENT SITUATION AND PUBLIC OPINION IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

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Germany has been active in the field of environmental policy for many years by fostering the so-called Energiewende, i.e. the German energy transformation. The Energiewende constitutes the German energy policy supporting renewable energy sources (RES) and the reduction of CO₂ emissions. Nowadays Germany is one of the worldwide leaders among RES production generating about 40% of energy from renewables. The most important role of the energy transition is given mainly to the German society, in which support for RES increases annually. The current study presents short history and German public opinion over the years about the process of Energiewende.

Keywords: Energiewende, energy transition, renewable energy sources, RES, public opinion, ecological consciousness, Germany, European Union, EU.

The breakthrough point for Energiewende had occurred in 2011 after the disaster at the Japanese nuclear power plant in Fukushima. The German government decided to shut down nuclear power plants more quickly than previously planned. This sudden turn of events triggered an emotional debate on the future of traditional and renewable energy sources.

On 6 June 2011, the Federal Government set long-term goals for the development of renewable energy sources for the first time. In its turn, after the Bundestag elections in autumn 2013, the representatives of the new German federal government (CDU/CSU and SPD) defined the basic objectives for the further development of RES in the coalition agreement concluded at the time. According to those plans, by 2025 RES need to cover 40–45 % of the country's energy demand and to reach 55–60 % in 2035 [1].

Until the end of the 1990s, the share of RES was rather symbolic and did not exceed 5 % of the total energy consumption in the country. The RES Act (Erneuerbares-Energien-Gesetz, EEG), which was adopted in 2000, was very important instrument for achieving far-reaching environmental goals. The situation in this respect has changed significantly in the following years. As a result, in the years 2015–2016, already one third of the energy used in Germany came from RES. Nowadays almost 40 % is coming from RES produced in Germany.

Germany is a part of the European Union climate and energy package "20-20-20". Under this regulation, the German energy produced from RES should reach at least 18 %. Nowadays this number is twice as big, which makes Germany one of the key countries supporting the climate change mitigation. Moreover, the numbers show ability of Germany to be a regional leader in RES development among EU states [2].

The rapid development of RES entails challenges and problems which may slow down the implementation of the long-term energy strategy. The biggest problem is the increase in the costs of RES. The fee that energy consumers pay to support RES has risen from 1.02 euro cents per kilowatt hour in 2007 to 5.28 euro cents in 2013, which has translated into an increase in the price of electricity [3].

Nevertheless the RES support of German people is incredible high, which is connected with strong environmental consciousness. According to the polls, in 2018 93 % of Germans agree with the statement that the expansion of RES is very important (68 %) and important (24%). About 88 % of people agree that costs related to the Energiewende for private sector are too high, but have agreed to support the energy transition. The same 88 % approve and support their government in policies fostering the Energiewende. 82 % agreed with the statement "The Energiewende is an important project that I personally deem to be right", from which 28 % was fully agree.

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