

Böll Dinner Debate, 15 November 2013 in Warsaw
From East to West – Poland, Germany and France:
How to make the European Energy Transition work?¹

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges that humankind has ever faced, and we are running out of time. The decarbonisation of the energy sector lies at the centerpiece of the fight against climate change. The European Union (EU) is currently debating its climate and energy framework until 2030. An ambitious 2030 package could help to build the much needed momentum toward a global climate agreement in 2015.

The energy policies of the Member States will have far reaching impacts on the EU's 2030 decisions. Poland has a vast – so-far widely untapped – potential to enhance energy efficiency and to increase the renewables share of its energy mix and thus reduce its high dependence on coal. The implementation of the *Energiewende* in Germany is held under scrutiny by the upcoming Grand Coalition government. And France is currently debating its energy transition pathway and a true engagement for a future with less or no nuclear is still hanging in the air.

In the run-up to COP21 in Paris 2015, the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union organised a dinner debate at the sidelines of the UN Climate Summit in Warsaw to focus on Poland, Germany and France on how to make the energy transition work: How can an exchange between East and West help to increase understanding and to learn from each other about challenges and opportunities of the energy transition? And what is the potential for an increased bilateral – and European – cooperation in order to transform our energy systems including measures to increase energy efficiency?

Poland

While the public support for an energy transition in Poland is quite high, mobilisation tends to be rather difficult. As now is the time to pave the way for changes and to create a critical mass, it is crucial to work with citizen organisations and to make the benefits visible to the people. It should be made clear that the alternative to coal is more than windmills. In particular, the high potential of energy efficiency should be tackled. In terms of target groups, the trade unions play a critical role in the Polish decision making process. Thus, the benefits of an energy transition for employment, e.g. “green jobs” in the shipyard industry (offshore wind) or construction sector (retrofitting), are important to generate support for an energy transition in Poland. Besides, the corporate capturing of the Polish energy policy should be uncovered. The high protectionism in the energy field contradicts with the rather liberal market policies of Poland.

¹ Main speakers included Claude Turmes, MEP, Vice President of the Green Group in the European Parliament; Andrzej Kassenberg, President, The Institute for Sustainable Development; Célia Gautier, EU Climate Policy Officer, Climate Action Network (RAC) – France; and Jörg Haas, Programme Director Global Climate Policies, European Climate Foundation. Silvia Brugger, Director Climate and Energy Programme, HBF EU Office and Wolfgang Templin, Director, HBF Warsaw Office introduced the discussion and Kathrin Glastra, Project Coordinator Climate and Energy Programme, HBF EU Office moderated the debate. The event was held under Chatham House Rule. The opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung.

France

Currently, a national debate on the French energy transition is being held. With nuclear power dominating the national energy mix, renewable energy sources are in a rather difficult situation in France. President Hollande lacks public support to enforce an energy transition. In the year 2015, the French government will host the Climate Summit in Paris where an international climate agreement shall be made. The run-up to COP21 in Paris can help to leverage political will for an energy transition in France.

Germany

The new government of Germany will continue with the *Energiewende*, however, the conventional industry interests highly influenced the coalition talks. The implementation of the German energy transition lacks ambition and entails many shortcomings. Germany might even hide behind Poland when it comes to a structural reform of the European Emissions Trading System (ETS). Such a reform is urgently needed to repair the cornerstone of the European Union's policy to combat climate change. The decentralized ownership models of the energy system in Germany have increased public support and acceptance for the German *Energiewende*. These bottom-up dynamics are something that can be built upon.

European Union

The EU is currently debating its climate and energy framework post-2020, when the Climate and Energy Package with its 20-20-20 targets will have expired. Early target setting for the year 2030 could risk locking in low ambition to business as usual. However, a delaying tactic is unlikely to drive the ambition level, as worse conditions can be expected after the EU elections. In view of the UN climate process, pledges should be made between the Ban Ki Moon Summit in September 2014 and the Climate Conference in Lima in the end of 2014 and this international agenda can be used to push for ambition from the EU. Taking into account the different dynamics of the debates at Member State and EU level, Germany's position on the EU's 2030 climate and energy framework will be crucial to define the overall ambition level.

Strategies for a European Energy Transition

Bottom up dynamics to generate support from a critical mass should be fostered, e.g. by organising a movement of rural electrification through renewables and making use of the cooperative model. As this will not be enough and a real consensus is needed in favour of such a transition, it is important to also get support from government and parts of industry. Ways have to be found to make the "silent majority" heard. This means translating the high levels of public support for an energy transition in countries such as France and Poland into the higher decision-making level in spite of the weakness of green political actors in these countries. COP21 in Paris could be one way to mobilise the civil society and to make voices heard.

Strategies should be found in order to rupture the unity of the Visegrád group in the energy field. Compensation will be needed in order to get Poland – and others – on board. The use of EU structural cohesion funds could be an option that should be discussed with civil servants and decision makers. EU state aid rules should be used to stop coal fire plants and thus redirect investments in clean energy sources.

Germany can play a crucial role to trigger political support for an energy transition in both Poland and France. An alliance between France and Germany on renewables should be formed, while bearing in mind the risk of a pro-coal alliance of President Hollande and the Grand Coalition of Merkel, Gabriel and Kraft. Poland and France are highly centralised countries, which is particularly relevant for the energy sector, which contrasts with the federal nature of Germany. These differences in terms of state structure and grid infrastructure have to be taken into account when asking for more cooperation.

Poland, Germany and France could serve as a strategic triangle for a successful European energy transition. Scandinavian stakeholders could also be included, especially on grids. Green thinking people from these countries should be re-organised and a structured dialogue should be set up including business and NGOs. With a focus on the job creation argument and topics such as energy efficiency, narratives can be changed from East to West to make the European Energy Transition work.