

Poland out of step with Europe on climate

March 14 2012, By KARL RITTER and VANESSA GERA , Associated Press



Coal is transported at the Zeran Heating Plant in Warsaw, Poland, Wednesday, March 14, 2012. Frustrations with Poland are growing in the EU after the coal-powered nation blocked for a second time last week, the union's blueprint for cutting carbon emissions, and now the EU's climate commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, says the bloc will move ahead with its low-carbon plans anyway and not let Poland set the pace for the rest of Europe. (AP Photo/Alik Keplicz)

(AP) -- Frustrations with Poland are growing in the European Union after the coal-powered nation for a second time blocked the EU's long-term plans for cutting carbon emissions.

As the lone dissenting voice, Poland last week vetoed the EU's [road map](#) for emissions reductions beyond 2020, drawing sharp criticism from environmental groups and EU officials.

Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard said the EU's executive

commission would press ahead with plans for a low-carbon economy despite Poland's objections.

"They cannot set the pace for all of Europe," Hedegaard told The Associated Press.

The EU's road map reflects the stated goal by European governments to reduce emissions by 85-90 percent by 2050, compared to 1990 levels.

While Warsaw hasn't objected to that far-off goal, it has resisted intermediate targets. Last year it vetoed the road map over a reference to raising the EU's reduction target to 25 percent by 2020, from the current target of 20 percent.

When that part was scratched in the latest plan, put before environment ministers on Friday, Poland objected instead to midterm targets of 40 percent emissions cuts by 2030 and 60 percent by 2040, said Danish Climate Minister Martin Lidegaard, who chaired the talks.

Poland's objections, he noted, appear to be a "moving target."

"You could get that feeling. But on the other hand Poland has agreed to the 2050 target and they don't question that one. So to me it is open question what is the driving force here," he told AP.

It's unclear how the EU's executive commission will proceed now because the EU's carbon targets require unanimous approval.

Thomas Spencer, a research fellow in climate and energy economics at the Paris-based think tank IDDRI, said Poland's veto could mean that Europe runs out of time in pinning down its post-2020 emissions targets in time for 2015, the deadline set for a new global [climate pact](#).

"If the EU doesn't get its act together it's going to be rather hamstrung in those discussions," he said.

Poland is resisting the EU's 2050 carbon roadmap because it relies heavily on its natural coal deposits and believes that moves to a low-carbon economy would hurt economic development in this ex-communist country.

"You have to take into account our specific circumstances, mainly that coal is an indigenous resource here," Polish Environment Minister Marcin Korolec told AP. "We have the privilege to have this coal at home and this is also part of our starting point and an important element of our energy security."

Korolec said that Poland relies on coal for 93 percent of its electricity and that adopting the 2050 roadmap would cause Poland's economy 1 percent of GDP growth per year through 2030, if not longer.

Poland otherwise depends heavily on imported gas and oil for other energy needs. Most comes from Russia, a dependence that Poland resents and is trying to free itself of with plans to build nuclear power plants in several years and with an ongoing search for shale gas.

Korolec also argued that the EU shouldn't have an overly ambitious roadmap going into negotiations for a new [global climate](#) treaty because other parts of the world "will ask us for even more."

Climate activists, including in Poland, blasted the country's veto. Greenpeace said Poland "is adding to its image of an outdated economy and is holding back progress for the entire continent," while the Climate Action Network said the veto was bad news for both Europe and Poland.

"Without incentives for green investment, it risks being unable to

complete urgently required modernization of its outmoded energy system," said Julia Michalak, of CAN Europe.

Andrzej Kassenberg, the president of the Institute for Sustainable Development in Warsaw, noted that 40 percent of the power stations in Poland are more than 50 years old and the power grid is also old and inefficient, meaning that major investments are going to be required in the next years either way.

"For the Polish economy and energy sector, the (EU's 2050) target can create pressure for changing in the direction of a more innovative and modern economy," Kassenberg said. "It's a huge opportunity because we need to invest in the energy sector anyway."

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Citation: Poland out of step with Europe on climate (2012, March 14) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-03-poland-europe-climate.html>

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