

German environment minister backs contentious carbon pricing

November 29 2018, by Frank Jordans



Clouds of smoke over Europe's largest lignite power plant in Betchatow, central Poland, on Wednesday, Nov. 28, 2018. A group of Greenpeace environment activists have climbed its 180-meter smokestack to spur participants in next week's global climate summit in Poland into taking decisions on limiting the use of coal.(AP Photo/Czarek Sokolowski)

Germany's environment minister has thrown her weight behind proposals to price carbon dioxide and kick-start the country's stalled efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Svenja Schulze has clashed over the issue of carbon pricing with other members of the German government, who object to such a levy. But with Germany predicted to miss its 2020 target for cutting greenhouse gases, Schulze said Thursday that "new ideas" needed to be discussed.

Germany lags behind European neighbors such as France, Switzerland and Britain in using taxes to steer companies and consumers away from fossil fuel use, partly for fear of alienating the powerful German auto lobby.

"We need incentives for the transport sector, for the building sector, to behave differently," Schulze told The Associated Press. "And I think CO2 pricing is the right answer for this."

"We see it works in other countries," she said, adding that introducing a price on carbon should avoid placing a further burden on people with low incomes.

Her comments come just days before the start of an international climate summit that will seek to build on the landmark 2015 Paris accord, when countries agreed to try to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) by the end of the century.



German environment minister Svenja Schulze speaks at an event on the future of coal in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Nov. 29, 2018. (AP Photo/Frank Jordans)

German officials had planned to travel to the talks in Katowice, Poland, with a blueprint for phasing out Germany's use of coal over the coming decades. But an expert committee examining the issue postponed its report until after the meeting, leaving diplomats with little to showcase.

"It would have been good to have the results," said Schulze.

However, she insisted that the mere fact the committee is meeting sends a signal that Germany is serious about tackling the issue.

While Germany has drawn international acclaim for ramping up its use of renewable energy—partly with the help of subsidies paid through a consumer levy on electricity—coal still provides about 40 percent of the country's electricity.

Experts have warned that Germany may have to spend tens of billions of euros buying emissions rights from other countries to avoid breaching its international commitments.



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