

Germans favor swift end to coal use as decision nears

January 25 2019, by Frank Jordans



German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier, front center, is surrounded by students during a 'School Strike 4 Climate' protest in Berlin, Germany, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. (Gregor Fischer/dpa via AP)

As experts held crunch talks Friday on Germany's plans to wean itself off coal in the coming years, thousands of young people marched through the capital calling for a swift end to fossil fuel use.

Many of those protesting were students who had skipped school to rally against [climate change](#), which they see as a big threat to their generation.

Chanting slogans such as "we are here, we are loud, because you are stealing our future," an estimated 5,000 people walked from the economy ministry, where the talks were held, to German Chancellor Angela Merkel's office.

An opinion poll released by public broadcaster ZDF found that a majority of Germans, 73 percent, agree a quick exit from coal is very important. The telephone poll of 1,285 people, conducted Jan. 22-24, had a margin of error of about three percentage points.

Those opposed to a rapid pullout include miners and other workers whose livelihoods depend on coal, some of whom staged a smaller morning protest outside the ministry demanding assurances from the government that jobs would be protected.

The government last year appointed a 28-member panel made up of scientists, politicians, environmental campaigners and business representatives to examine how the shift away from coal can be made as smooth as possible.



Students hold protest posters during a 'School Strike 4 Climate' protest in front of the Reichstag building, host of the German federal parliament, in Berlin, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. (Gregor Fischer/dpa via AP)

The panel's meeting in Berlin follows months of haggling over the amount of funding affected regions and companies will get, and what the final deadline for coal use in Germany will be.

Greenpeace, which wants all [coal plants](#) shut down by 2030, said Germany needs to show leadership after failing to cut its [carbon emissions](#) for a decade.

"We need legally binding goals for how quickly emissions in Germany need to fall," Martin Kaiser, head of international climate politics at Greenpeace, told The Associated Press. "Otherwise we will crash past the climate goals for 2030, as we did for 2020."



German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier talks to students during a 'School Strike 4 Climate' protest in Berlin, Germany, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. (Gregor Fischer/dpa via AP)

Germany is committed to an '[energy transition](#)' that involves replacing fossil fuels with renewable sources such as solar and wind power. While the country has made great strides in that direction—renewables beat coal for the first time last year—removing coal from the power equation entirely is a major challenge .

Economy Minister Peter Altmaier said ensuring a reliably supply of electricity and affordable energy prices were a priority for Europe's biggest economy.

"The energy transition will succeed if we get a big consensus from all

actors in society," Altmaier told reporters.

If Friday's meeting fails to reach consensus, a further meeting is scheduled for Feb. 1. Chancellor Angela Merkel has already scheduled a meeting with governors from [coal](#) mining states next Thursday.



Protesters hold a posters prior to a meeting of a panel of experts on the exit of the using coal called 'Coal Commission' in Berlin, Germany, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. Germany wants to stop using coal, a major source of the carbon emissions that drive climate change. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)



Union protesters hold flags prior to a meeting of a panel of experts on the exit of the using coal called 'Coal Commission' in Berlin, Germany, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. Germany wants to stop using coal, a major source of the carbon emissions that drive climate change. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)



In this photo taken Aug. 27, 2018 bucket wheel digs for coal near the Hambach Forest near Dueren, Germany. (AP Photo/Martin Meissner)



Union protesters beat drums prior to a meeting of a panel of experts on the exit of the using coal called 'Coal Commission' in Berlin, Germany, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. Germany wants to stop using coal, a major source of the carbon emissions that drive climate change. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)



Protesters hold a poster prior to a meeting of a panel of experts on the exit of the using coal in Germany called 'Coal Commission' in Berlin, Germany, Friday, Jan. 25, 2019. Germany wants to stop using coal, a major source of the carbon emissions that drive climate change. Slogan reads 'coal free - instead of climate crises'. (Kay Nietfeld/dpa via AP)

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