Most EU countries cut CO2 emissions last year: estimates

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Most European Union countries reduced carbon dioxide emissions last year, estimates showed Wednesday, marking a turnaround in the battle

against greenhouse gases as campaigners urged faster action to avoid the most damaging effects of climate change.

Overall EU emissions from burning oil, coal and gas were 2.5 percent lower in 2018 than the previous year, Eurostat figures showed, with 20 of the bloc's 28 countries reporting reductions.

That was better than 2017, which saw combined emissions 1.8 percent higher than 2016 and only seven countries recording decreases, according to the EU's statistics office.

The EU has pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

"After four years without substantial emission reductions, the EU has finally started to walk the road to the zero-carbon economy," said Wendel Trio, who heads the activist group Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe.

"To be able to avoid ever wilder extreme weather events, greater drought, food shortages and economic devastation, we need sharp falls in emissions every single year," Trio added.

Portugal took the lead with the sharpest decrease, Eurostat figures showed, recording a nine percent drop in emissions from 2017.

It was followed by Bulgaria, with a 8.1 percent reduction. Ireland's were 6.8 percent lower and Germany's fell 5.4 percent.

Britain was last in line, with a slim 0.3 percent decrease on 2017.

Latvia leads laggards

On the other hand, Latvia recorded the poorest result, with emissions up 8.5 percent from the year before.

Other countries in the bloc whose emissions rose include Poland, which recorded an increase of 3.5 percent.

The EU has vowed to lead the way in saving the Paris climate agreement since the United States, the world's second biggest polluter after China, withdrew in 2017.

The pact aims to keep the worldwide rise in temperatures "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial times.

Germany, the bloc's most populous country and its most powerful economy, accounted for the largest share of the union's emissions last year, at 22 percent.

It was followed by Britain at 11.4 percent, Poland at 10.3 percent as well as by France and Italy, at 10 percent each. Germany, Britain, France and Italy are among the bloc's leading economies and have the largest populations.

Poland, whose population is significantly lower than the other top polluters, relies on antiquated coal-fired power plants to generate nearly all of its electricity, giving it some of the highest carbon emissions in the EU.

In other developments, Britain's National Grid Electricity System Operator revealed it has managed a week of powering electricity without using coal for the first time since 1882, as the country targets zero carbon emissions.

And German insurer Allianz announced it aims to make the massive

investments that back its business "climate-neutral" by 2050. It means Allianz will no longer invest money in shares or bonds issued by companies whose activity is harmful to the climate.

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