

German cabinet passes nuclear exit bill

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel speaks with Economy Minister Philipp Roesler before a cabinet meeting at the Chancellery in Berlin. The German cabinet signed off on a bill phasing out nuclear power in Europe's biggest economy by 2022, prompted by the disaster in March at Japan's Fukushima plant.

The German cabinet signed off Monday on a bill phasing out nuclear power in Europe's biggest economy by 2022, prompted by the disaster in March at Japan's Fukushima plant.

"I am convinced that the government's decision today represents a milestone in the economic and social development of our country," Environment Minister Norbert Roettgen told reporters in Berlin.

The pace of the switch-off is faster than that announced last week by Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#), with the nine reactors currently on line due to be turned off between 2015 and 2022, according to the text of the bill.

Previously Merkel had said that six reactors would shut down in 2021 and the three most modern in 2022. The seven oldest reactors were already shut down following the Fukushima crisis.

A further reactor has been shut for years because of technical problems.

The decision represents a humbling U-turn for Merkel, who in late 2010 took the unpopular decision to extend the lifetime of Germany's 17 reactors by an average of 12 years, keeping them open until the mid-2030s.

The bill focuses on ways to fill the gap left by nuclear power, on which Germany relies for some 22 percent of its energy needs.

This includes building new coal and gas power plants, expanding the production of electricity with [renewable sources](#) like solar and [wind power](#), reducing Germany's [energy use](#) and improving transmission networks.

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