

Editorial



Dr Hans-Joachim Ziesing,
Head of the Department of Energy,
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'Can the new German government
resolve the goal conflicts between its
energy and climate-change policies?'

On taking office the new German government set itself ambitious goals in the areas of environmental and energy policy. It wanted to embark on an irreversible process of ending the use of nuclear power, make a start on an ecological reform of the taxation system, and provide additional support for renewable sources of energy. It also intends to honour the commitment made by the previous government to reduce CO₂ emissions in Germany by 25%, compared with 1990 levels, by the year 2005.

After only slightly more than six months in office, it can hardly be expected that all of the planned initiatives would have been implemented within such a short space of time, not least in view of the stiff opposition put up by those social groups affected. Yet even at the conceptual level, the federal government's energy policy lacks rigour. Without doubt, the recently implemented first stage of the ecological tax reform constitutes a central element of the energy policy the government wishes to pursue. On 1 April an electricity tax was introduced, and the tax rates on petroleum products, heating oil and natural gas were increased. The additional government revenue (DM 12½ billion on an annual basis) will be used to finance a cut in the social insurance contributions paid by employers and employees by 0.4 percentage points each. This first step towards an ecological tax reform has been criticised for failing to make a significant contribution to meeting the government's ecological policy aims. Critics had hoped that the new government would proceed with more determination and rigour on this issue. The public debate has focused almost exclusively on the additional tax burden on consumers, and has ignored the numerous ways of avoiding the additional energy taxes, not least by way of more energy-conscious behaviour. Even so, it is vital that a decision is quickly taken on the subsequent stages, involving tax rates that exert a noticeable steering effect and incorporate all fossil fuels.

It is possible to terminate the use of nuclear energy and at the same time reduce CO₂ emissions. But this requires a comprehensive range of measures to ensure the rational use of energy and electricity in all sectors, including strategies to reduce transport-related emissions of greenhouse gases and a substantial increase in the support offered to renewable sources of energy.

If the 25%-reduction target is to be achieved by 2005, it is not possible without a fundamental change in energy and climate-protection policy. The necessity for effective political action becomes even more apparent if one looks beyond 2005. From then on renewable sources of energy must account for an ever-increasing proportion of our energy needs. The policy framework needed to achieve this shift must be put in place now. The German government must soon begin to implement effective measures in this area if it is not to lose its ecological credibility and miss the opportunity of ending the use of nuclear energy in a way that does not lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.