

Editorial



Dr Hans-Joachim Ziesing,
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and Environment, asks:

'Is the increasing productivity of
energy use sufficient to ensure that
Germany's energy system conforms
to climate protection goals?'

At the end of this decade, primary energy consumption in Germany will be almost 5% lower than in 1990, in spite of the fact that the population has increased by almost 2.7 million in the course of the 1990s, and the economy has grown at an annual average rate of 1.7%. This means that the overall productivity of energy use has risen during this period at an annual average rate of as much as 2.2%. According to a recent energy forecast for the ministry of the economy, energy productivity is expected to continue to improve at a similar rate in the coming decades. In 2020 primary energy consumption in Germany is expected to be below its current level.

However, this positive overall trend cannot conceal the fact that the central climate-protection goals set by the German government are still far from being realised. As recently as the start of this November, at the 5th conference of the parties to the framework Convention on Climate Change, Chancellor Schröder reaffirmed the German government's goal of reducing, by 2005, CO₂ emissions in Germany by one quarter compared with their level in 1990. Yet according to the most recent energy prognosis, CO₂ emissions will be reduced by just 14% during this period. Only a marginal further decline is expected compared with the current emission figures.

It is now clear that Germany's national CO₂ target for 2005 can be achieved – if, indeed, it is at possible – only if a swift and fundamental reorientation of energy and environmental policies is brought about. Yet this implies that macroeconomic energy productivity rises far more steeply than forecast, and that a fundamental shift occurs in energy-source structure in favour of low or zero-emission energy sources. An important first step has been taken in this direction with the implementation of the first stages of the ecological tax reform, and the system of support measures for renewable sources of energy. Yet this is far from sufficient. Many additional and more far-reaching steps will be required if Germany is to have in the coming century an energy system that is compatible with climate protection considerations. The government cannot and must not shirk its responsibility in this area, not least in view of the international commitments it has made.