

Chancellor Merkel is urging the federal states to be co-operative in the German energy transformation

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On 23 May, Chancellor Angela Merkel convened another energy summit at the Chancellery. The participants of the meeting included the ministers for the economy, finance and transport and the new minister for the natural environment, Peter Altmaier (CDU), as well as the prime ministers of Germany's sixteen federal states. They discussed the increasingly serious problems with the energy transformation in Germany (*Energiewende*), the most important project of the present government domestically. The implementation of the key guidelines of the new energy strategy, such as the development of the transmission networks, the construction of small and efficient conventional power plants, and the reduction of subsidies for the solar energy sector are coming up against ever more serious difficulties of both an economic and a legal nature. Chancellor Merkel emphasised at the meeting that the German government was determined to carry through this transformation and announced that more summits would be held in six-month cycles in order to monitor progress.

Commentary

- The intention of extensive consultations with the participation of not only the ministers but, more importantly, also the federal states, is to show that Chancellor Merkel has diagnosed the main problems of the energy transformation and is trying to resolve them. She has demonstrated that she intends to personally take over the supervision and control of this vast enterprise as a whole and she will ensure co-operation between the central institutions (i.e. individual ministries, especially for the economy and the natural environment) and the federal states. The lack of such consultations has ended with governmental solutions being vetoed at the Bundesrat already on several occasions.
- The systemic coordination of *Energiewende*, the adjustment of the German economy so that it uses predominantly renewable energy sources, requires not only joint action at the ministerial level—the conflicting interests of individual federal states must also be reconciled (these have also been expressed in mutually contradictory documents – the energy strategies of individual federal states). The federal states in northern Germany want Berlin to support investments in wind power plants, whereas Bavaria, which is located in the south of the country, is demanding subsidies for the construction of gas power plants. The federal states in the east of the country are pinning their hopes on the

solar energy sector, which is highly developed there. The lack of co-operation between the federal states has also impeded the development of a network for electric power transmission, especially from the wind farms in the north to the south of the country. It has also prevented both houses of the German parliament from adopting resolutions to reduce subsidies for the solar energy sector.

- The most critical stance has been taken by the government of Bavaria. This government is formed jointly by the FDP and the CSU, an affiliate of the CDU and its coalition partner in the federal government. The prime minister of Bavaria, Horst Seehofer, warned Chancellor Merkel that the federal government would have limited influence on the energy policy of this federal state unless Bavaria received adequate support in the process of energy transformation. The way *Energiewende* is implemented will influence the outcome of both local elections in Bavaria and –above all – the elections to the Bundestag, both of which have been scheduled for 2013. The opposition SPD and the Green Party, which have been deprived of one of the key proposals on their agenda as a consequence of Angela Merkel's decision to withdraw from the use of nuclear energy, are closely scrutinising the government's work in this area.