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CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 14.12.2011 www.osw.waw.pl

The EU “Energy Roadmap 2050” contradictory to the German government's strategy

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On 9 December the German Commissioner for Energy Gunther Oettinger commented on the EU long-term energy strategy. Its premises are featured in the “Energy Roadmap 2050” which is set to be published this week. It foresees the establishment of 40 new nuclear power plants in Europe by 2050, the possibility to obtain co-funding for their construction from the EU budget and the implementation of 12 Carbon Capture and Storage pilot projects by 2015. Oettinger believes that nuclear energy will play an equally important role alongside renewable energy in the reduction of CO_2 emissions. In his opinion, without CCS installations coal will not remain part of the European “energy mix” for long; (the mix will include energy from renewable sources, nuclear energy and conventional energy (gas, coal).

Commentary

- The premises of the EU energy strategy presented by the EU Commissioner for Energy Gunther Oettinger run contrary to the strategy of the German government which has decided to pull out of the use of nuclear energy after 2022 and to increase energy production from renewable energy resources (up to 38% by 2020).

- Oettinger's plans and the premises of the “Energy Roadmap 2050” are in opposition to the interests of the green technologies lobby and have been starkly criticised by the SPD, the Green Party and Greenpeace. The development of nuclear energy in Europe is in competition to the renewable energy sector (due to low CO_2 emissions), in which German companies have a large share on the European market. Germany is the second largest, after China, exporter and investor in the renewable energy sector.

- The German government is pushing for stricter safety criteria for nuclear power plants in the EU through the introduction of resistance tests for reactors. Negative results in these tests may cause an increase in the costs of constructing new reactors (for example in Poland) or closures of old plants (for instance in France near the German border). Germany may also seek to make changes in the Euratom Treaty and to include them in the Treaty of Lisbon. This would be aimed at tightening control over the pursued national

nuclear programmes.

- After the decisions made by the German government regarding the withdrawal from nuclear energy by 2020 and to close down black coal mines by 2018, a problem with balancing the demand for energy in Germany appeared. After the Bundesrat rejected the draft law on CCS the Swedish company Vattenfall, which was responsible for the implementation of the first CCS project in Germany, pulled out of the implementation, which hindered the development of this technology in Germany at least for the coming years. Germany will be increasingly forced to use gas in electricity as low-carbon renewable energy technologies are currently not able to ensure continued electricity supplies. This will mean increases in CO_2 emissions, possible difficulties in the implementation of the EU directive regarding the reduction of CO_2 emissions (the government has been planning a reduction of 40% by 2020 compared 1990 levels) and an increased dependence on gas imports, including imports from Russia.