

The consequences of the moratorium on the extension of the operation of nuclear reactors in Germany

The three-month moratorium on the extension of the operation of nuclear reactors in Germany, which Chancellor Angela Merkel announced on 15 March, gave rise to a heated debate on its consequences. The owners of the reactors (RWE, E.ON, EnBW and Vattenfall) are pointing to their financial losses. The 'green technology' lobby is appealing for the creation of legal regulations which will allow the replacement of nuclear energy with energy obtained from renewable sources (RES). However, it seems that the government will continue its previous nuclear policy, and its decision to impose the moratorium will only bring financial losses in the energy sector.

The energy companies have warned they will contest the moratorium at the Constitutional Court, indicating that a decision to this effect can be taken only by parliament. Eight reactors are to be switched off temporarily in March and five more in May. In total, they produce around 17% of electric power in Germany. Only two reactors are to be withdrawn from operation completely (they account for 2% of electric energy production in Germany). According to the Institute of Economic Research, electricity prices will increase by 18% in the coming months, and the prices of CO₂ emission certificates will increase by 2 euros per tonne. The 'green technology' lobby, which is supported by the SPD, the Green Party and the minister for the environment, Norbert Roettgen (CDU), is working on a plan for RES development and to build approximately 3500 km of transmission networks by 2020, which will cost around 200 billion euros. In the short run, the moratorium will inflict losses on German companies because it will reduce their energy sale volumes. The lower supply of energy from German nuclear power plants will probably cause an increase in imports of nuclear energy from France and also in energy production using coal and gas in Germany. The announcement of the moratorium will add hardly any supporters to the CDU and the FDP before the local elections in Baden-Württemberg. Public opinion (68% of the respondents) believes that the government has taken this decision only to improve its image and will continue to support the operation of the nuclear reactors after 2020. <koma>