

## Climate Change : Climate Politics

### 1. Climate Profile Germany - Introduction

**The world's strongest green party, more solar power than any other country on Earth - Germany has long seen itself as cutting-edge when it came to environmental protection and climate change. Germany, much to its surprise, now discovers that it is not as green as hoped for.**



#### Picture Gallery

Knut, the German polar bear cub, has become a symbol for climate change. But beyond the headlines, climate change is slowly becoming reality (Photos: Reuters)

German car manufacturers face serious problems meeting EU emission guidelines and the planned nuclear power phase-out will require massive investments in renewable energies or else the lack of energy will have to be compensated by carbon dioxide heavy power plants run on coal.

Fortunately, the fruits of decades of work from policymakers, scientists, and investors have put Germany in a good position to make a transition to a more energy efficient and more climate-friendly economy. Since the unification of East and West Germany in 1990, Germany has actually reduced its carbon emissions, while other countries' have surged. This decrease, however, is in large parts due to the economic decline of emission intensive industries in former East-Germany.

#### Related Articles

- 2. Germany Climate Profile Factsheet
- 3. Germany Climate Profile - Impact on Environment and Society
- 4. Climate Profil Germany - Climate Strategy

The path to a "green" economy may not be as easy, nor as swift as environmentalists would like. Germany's reliance on coal presents a big obstacle. Energy security concerns – the desire to reduce dependence on imported gas and oil – and a host of other factors like rising energy costs, unemployment, or unpopularity of nuclear energy may delay the phasing-out the coal-fired power plants that many scientists say is necessary to reduce national carbon dioxide emissions.

#### A highly profitable energy revolution

Even with government targets to reduce emissions, more than two dozen coal plants were in planning or construction in Germany in early 2007. Although some argue that strict ecological restrictions will mean job losses and higher energy costs for Germany, the global energy

“revolution” is already proving highly profitable for German industries and investors.

Since the 1990s, Germany has developed into a world leader in renewable energy technologies, such as wind, solar, biomass and hydroelectric. Along with a growing domestic demand, Germany exported over six billion euros worth of solar photovoltaic cells, wind turbines, and other technologies in 2006.

Meanwhile, federal and local government in Germany has taken steps to promote energy efficiency in buildings, household appliances, and transport through taxes, tax breaks, and government funding. All of these policies may ultimately help Germany reach its goal of reducing the country's total carbon dioxide emissions by 21 percent by the year 2012 – significantly more than the mandatory eight percent imposed by the United Nations' Kyoto Protocol.

### **Pushing climate change to the top of the global agenda**

Germany's unique political situation in 2007 – its dual-role as president of the European Union and host of the annual group of eight (G8) industrialized nations summit – may help push climate change to the top of the global agenda. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she will use the political spotlight this year to highlight the urgency of climate change. In February, she presided over an agreement by all EU nations to cut greenhouse gases by 20 percent of 1990 levels by 2020, though it remains unclear exactly how that can be achieved.

The big hope in Berlin and Brussels is that the rest of the developed and developing world will follow with ambitious emissions-reduction plans of their own. As one climate expert told the weekly magazine Der Spiegel, “as long as China, India and the United States continue the way they have been, what we Germans do is more or less irrelevant.”

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