

For a European Future without Coal - Stop the Turów coal mine!

We are in the middle of a climate crisis. Greens all over Europe are fighting alongside civil society and millions of European citizens for a fast transition towards climate neutrality in line with the Paris Agreement. Green policy is built on rapidly expanding sustainable renewables, improving energy efficiency and reducing energy demand while phasing out the most harmful fuels such as coal. In regions that live off coal, such as the border region between Poland, Czechia and Germany, these necessary transitions are causing profound disruptions in the local labour market and creating a huge challenge for people and the region as a whole. Therefore, we Greens believe that ambitious climate goals must be based on a just transition: a Green and resilient recovery that will help to kick-start the economy and get people back to work.

Near the tri-border point between Czechia, Poland and Germany and close to the Polish city of Bogatynia, the Turów open-cast lignite mine and its power plant are working unaffected by the need for a just transition to climate neutrality –with severe negative impacts on water, air and soil in the surrounding environment. While Poland is the largest hard coal and second largest lignite producer in the EU, the catastrophic environmental consequences of a coal mine like Turów do not stop at its borders. Lowering groundwater levels of more than 20 metres are threatening thousands of people in the Liberec Region in Czechia with the loss of clean drinking water. Moreover, new studies estimate that, near the German-Polish border, land subsidence will increase to a total of 1.2 metres by 2044. In the centre of the German city of Zittau, it is estimated that land subsidence will increase to a total of 36 to 72 cm.

The original licence for the mine, dated 1994, expired on 30 April 2020. However, Michał Kurtyka, Poland's Minister of Climate, extended the licence for another six years without public consultations, which means citizens were unable to exercise their right to object. Thus, the continuation of mining in the Turów open-cast lignite mine violates EU law (Environmental Liability Directive, Water Framework Directive, Freedom of Access to Information Directive, Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment Directives).

For all these reasons, people throughout the cross-border region continue to protest and several thousand have submitted a petition to the European Parliament against the extension and expansion of the open-cast mine. Without doubt, replacing the Turów lignite mine with a mix of renewable energy sources located in Lower Silesia is beneficial to both the environment and people in the region. The benefits will be even greater if such a transition is planned between the three regions being impacted. The Polish government must stop blocking the Recovery Fund and enable the Turow region to benefit from the Just Transition Fund. There are feasible new jobs and future perspectives for the youth to be built in energy and other sectors, instead of facing a shrinking coal-dark future.

The European Greens support the protesters, environmental activists in the region and local Greens in their goal to actively promote and shape the structural change of the coal phase-out in line with the European Green Deal's objective of climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.

But in harsh opposition to this European objective, the open-cast lignite mine in Turów continues to operate.

We therefore demand:

- If the European Commission's ongoing mediation between Czechia and Poland fails, the Commission must take legal action against Poland in the form of an infringement procedure which will force the Polish government to comply with the obligatory consultation mechanisms. In reaction to Czechia's complaint to the European Commission on 30 September 2020, we ask the Commission to issue a reasoned opinion. When the reasoned opinion is delivered or after a deadline of three months after the complaint, Czechia should exercise its right to take the case to the EU Court of Justice on its own account.
- The border region of Poland, Germany and Czechia should aim to become a cross-border coal-exit region with the support of the sustainable use of funding, such as the European Just Transition Fund, implementing cross-border community projects on renewable energy and structural change.
- For a sustainable future, citizen participation is of the highest importance. In cross-border regions, we can see how Europe is growing together from below. The promotion of cross-border civil society cooperation, of encounters among people, should therefore be a priority for regional and national governments and must be further developed.
- The mining must stop immediately – until all the legal issues have been clarified.
- We need a European end to coal by 2030 at the latest. Therefore, governmental decisions to phase out coal should not be undermined by outdated investment protection deals, such as the Energy Charter Treaty which allows investors in fossil fuels to sue governments for compensation when they take action that harms their profits. If no substantial reform of the treaty is in sight in the ongoing negotiations, the EU must leave it.