

# REPORT

## The future of coal in Central Europe

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2018, 16:00-17:30  
European House, Jungmannova 24, Prague

- **The fourth debate of the cycle Prague Climate Talks took place on Thursday 19th April in the European House. This project is co-organized by EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy and Glopolis, in cooperation with Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Prague and under the auspices of the UN Information Centre Prague.**
- **The topic of the fourth debate was „The future of coal in Central Europe“. We welcome three distinguished speakers: Martin Hájek (Association for District Heating), Kathrin Gutmann (Europe Beyond Coal) and Andreas Piwek (Gelsenkirchen Municipality). The debate was moderated by Christian Kvorning Lassen from EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy.**

**Kathrin Gutmann** started the discussion by outlining the basic principles of the Europe Beyond Coal alliance, which connects non-governmental organisations in 14 European countries. The alliance believes that Europe will be coal-free by 2030 and is looking for the best solutions how to prepare for this situation in terms of energy, environmental and social policy. Gutmann noted that if the EU states want to uphold their commitments under the Paris Agreement, quitting coal mining and burning is inevitable. Another reason for the already on-going coal decline is its low profitability. For a successful transition to the post-coal era, she pinpointed especially the need for the member states to communicate and cooperate on their energy and climate policies. Gutmann sees renewable energy sources as well as improved energy efficiency as the ideal replacement for coal.

**Martin Hájek** of the Czech Association for District Heating agrees with Gutmann that coal is in decline and in the future will be phased-out completely. He, however, holds a more sceptical stance towards how quickly should these changes happen and what will replace coal as an energy source in the future. He fears that if a large number of coal power plants is decommissioned at one time, it can cause shortages of electricity and increase in prices. Accumulation of electricity is still much more difficult and expensive than accumulation of heat. At the same time, he agrees that it is necessary for European states to cooperate and not act as “islands in the middle of an ocean”, because energy policy of one country affects to a large degree the energy policies of the surrounding countries.

**Andreas Piwek** then spoke about the experience of the German city Gelsenkirchen, which has transformed from an industrial hub built around the mining of coal, into a greener and cleaner city widely employing the solar industry. The city, which lies in the heart of the Ruhr region, was once called “the city of thousand fires” is now referred to as “the city of thousand suns” and is often presented as the example of a successful transformation. In the second half of the 20th century, all of its mines were gradually closed down, which resulted in increased unemployment. The city then managed to attract new investors and re-start its economic activity, decrease its unemployment and

improve its natural environment. Piwek, however, pointed out that the transformation process took several decades and required a substantial amount of public and private funding (he estimated the overall costs at €350 million).

Afterwards, a lively discussion with the audience ensued. The questions focused on further details of the state of Gelsenkirchen nowadays, on the possible options of replacing coal as an energy source and on what the EU should do regarding the unification of energy policies of its member states.

*Prague Climate Talks is a new project aimed at establishing a platform for continued high-level discussion on the complex issue of climate change. Throughout a series of debates it will bring together experts and professionals from varying relevant fields as well as members of the general public.*

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Co-funded by the  
Europe for Citizens Programme  
of the European Union