Blog

WHAT CAN CZECHIA LEARN FROM POLAND'S SOLAR ENERGY SHIFT?

Kristína Kráľovská

June 2023

About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

EUROPEUM
INSTITUT PRO EVROPSKOU POLITIKU
INSTITUTE FOR EUROPEAN POLICY

Co-funded by
the European Union

Solar panels for every household

Currently, Poland has the 3rd highest number of new solar panels installed in the EU, according to the Solar Power Europe report. While solar panel installation is not as attractive anymore since the billing rules changed in April 2023, the subsidies offered by Poland between 2020-2022 created a solar boom so significant that the grid had to be extended to handle the new capacity. Despite the change in subsidies, the government still guarantees that solar investments will be feasible and profitable for citizens and businesses. Solar Power Europe evaluates the Polish solar boom as "remarkable", especially as the panel installation continued rising significantly after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

Additionally, solar energy became more attractive due to the overall independence it provides to the consumer, as well as the fact that in Poland, coal energy providers have been struggling with management issues, unstable energy prices and coping with the EU green regulations. While the Czech Republic also has a ´New Green Savings Program´ (Nová Zelená Úsporám), the system is rather complicated and mistakes often occur during the process, making the process less accessible, especially for the elderly. The Czech Republic has experienced an increase in solar energy, but hardly as significant as Poland. However, Czechia is already working on making the system easier for elderly people, while also encouraging younger family members to help their relatives with the online format of the application.

All in all, it was mostly the promotion and the low prices set by the Polish government that made the boom in Poland so much more significant than the one in the Czech Republic. Additionally, the photovoltaics in the Czech Republic use so called "phased measuring". This means that if a symmetrical system is measured according to the phased measuring, the photovoltaic operator pays almost the same amount for electricity to his supplier as if they had no photovoltaics at all.

This specific type of measuring undermines faster deployment of small-scale photovoltaics in Czechia.

Crises perception

Starting with Covid-19 and continuing with the Russian war in Ukraine, Europe has been facing multiple crises, including an energy crisis. As one of the reactions to the energy crisis, the Czech debate has revolved around the resurrection of coal mines and prolonging of the pre-agreed phase out dates. Poland decided to perceive the crisis as more of an opportunity for energy transition and push for efficient renewable energy. Moreover, Polish unions are very active in policy making and even though their main goal is to preserve coal, they work with the national government to create compromises and make the process feasible for all sides.

While the benefits of switching to renewable energy are mostly advocated for by NGOs and think tanks, the general public also increasingly shares this view. Both countries have been struggling with making the shift to solar energy economically feasible and making the grid ready for the transition. However, while Poland has managed the preparation and promotion of solar power, Czechia made it rather confusing, has not advertised the benefits and possibilities sufficiently, and has not prepared the grid enough to handle large capacities of photovoltaics.

Public support and battling disinformation

While Poland is the most coal-dependent country in the EU and has been putting off its coal phase out date, the public is leaning towards green energy. The policies are mostly being slowed down by the conservative government struggling with the implementation of the green transition and the coal workers' unions having a strong position in the country. However, the general public is pro-renewables.

In the Czech Republic, the political discourse is very different. Green policies have a rather negative connotation and the majority of the government finds them "unfeasible" and "unreliable", which also stands in the way of its financial support. While the Czech government has also been lagging behind with green policies and setting the coal phase out date, with Petr Fiala entering the office, the green transition witnessed a visible push. Fiala's government committed to phasing out coal by 2033, while promising that there will be significant cuts in coal operations before 2030. Furthermore, the government promises to focus on the full implementation of the Fit for 55 package, effective decarbonization and support of photovoltaics to cover 100 000 Czech roofs with solar panels by 2033.

Disinformation and anti-EU narratives also play a big role in how the green transformation is perceived by the public. While both Poland and Czechia have been facing strong anti-EU campaigns, very often criticizing the European Green Deal and other green policies, the public support for the EU in Poland is around 84%, with only around 52% in Czechia. All in all, while both countries are facing anti-EU campaigns on a certain level, it does not seem to work on the Polish society which supports the EU in general and sees the opportunities in green transition.

In conclusion, both Poland and the Czech Republic have a long road ahead when it comes to the green energy transition. The biggest lesson for the Czech Republic is to see challenges as opportunities rather than an excuse to prolong the life of fossil fuels at the expense of renewables.