

Germany votes to end nuclear power by 2022

Fourth largest industrial nation set to replace nuclear with renewable energy

Associated Press
guardian.co.uk, Thursday 30 June 2011 14.16 BST

[A larger](#) | [smaller](#)



Angela Merkel's centre-right government has changed tack on its attitude to nuclear energy. Photograph: Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

German MPs have overwhelmingly approved plans to shut down the country's nuclear plants by 2022, putting [Europe's](#) biggest economy on the road to an ambitious build-up of renewable [energy](#).

The lower house of parliament voted 513-79 for the [shutdown plan drawn up by Angela Merkel's government after Japan's post-tsunami nuclear disaster](#). Most of the opposition voted in favour.

MPs sealed the shutdown of eight of the older reactors, which have been off the grid since March. [Germany's](#) remaining nine reactors will be shut down in stages by the end of 2022.

By 2020, Germany wants to double the share of energy stemming from water, wind, sun or biogas to at least 35%. Until this year, nuclear energy accounted for a little less than a quarter of Germany's power.

"Some people abroad ask: will Germany manage this? Can it be done? It is the first time that a major industrial country has declared itself ready to carry through this technological and economic revolution," the environment minister, Norbert Röttgen, told MPs.

"The message from today is this: the Germans are getting to work," he said. "This will be good for our country, because we all stand together. So let's get to work."

The government hasn't put a price tag on the plan to shift to renewable sources. "Of course it will cost something, but it won't overburden anyone," Röttgen said.

The vote completed a spectacular about-turn on nuclear energy by Merkel's centre-right coalition. Only last year, it had amended a previous centre-left government's plan to abandon nuclear power by the early 2020s and extended the life span of Germany's 17 reactors by an average of 12 years.

Merkel said the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi plant had prompted her to re-evaluate the risks of nuclear power.

Opposition leaders taunted the government over its U-turn, which Merkel initiated less than two weeks before two state elections in March.

"We are approving this out of full conviction, but you are doing it merely to preserve power," said Sigmar Gabriel, the head of the centre-left Social Democrats.

Renate Künast, the co-leader of the Greens' parliamentary group, said she didn't care why Merkel had changed course: "For me, it's enough of a historical irony that you now have to come close to what you fought for decades," she said.

"Now no one can deny that Germany wants an energy turnaround," added Künast. Her party has always opposed nuclear energy, which has been unpopular in Germany since the 1986 Chernobyl disaster sent radioactivity drifting over the country.

Still, she complained that the government's renewable energy target was unambitious, arguing that Germany should be aiming for a share of well over 40%.

"The world is watching us now, and we will have to do justice to that," Künast said. "That is the scale of this task: we must show that this works for the fourth biggest industrial country."

Parliament's upper house, which represents Germany's 16 states, is expected to endorse the plans next week, but much of the package does not formally require its approval.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2011