



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

How certain is Germany's return to nuclear power?



The future German government will begin its term with some indecision about the fate of nuclear power plants, while citizens expect it to find a solution to rising energy costs as quickly as possible.

However, the leader of the Conservatives and future Chancellor, Friedrich Merz, left little room for discussion on the possible **renewal** of nuclear energy capacities, although he rejected the idea of reactivating decommissioned nuclear power plants in principle.

"They are being dismantled, they are being decontaminated. There is no way to fix this, most likely," said the CDU leader towards the end of the campaign ahead of the elections held on 23 February.

At the same time, however, Mr Merz maintained the moratorium on the deconstruction of old plants in order to keep options open for some future decision. This includes the reactivation of nuclear power plants, which Mr Merz does not expect to be adopted during his government's term.

The return to nuclear power plants was one of Merz's most important, albeit risky, promises in the run-up to the election. The CDU's pre-election manifesto already included the promise to examine the possibility "of restarting operations at the nuclear power plants that were recently shut down."

This was just one of the points of discontinuity that Merz wanted to emphasise in relation to when the Conservatives were led by Angela Merkel.

The cost of denuclearisation

At the time of Angela Merkel, starting from the 2011 disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan, Germany began to phase out nuclear power plants, which ended with the closure of the last three in 2023.

At the same time, it was a time of strategic dependence on Russian energy sources, which

ended ingloriously with Russian aggression against Ukraine and the liberation of Europe from energy dependence on Russia.

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The window for a future return to nuclear power generation in Germany remains open, precisely because of the sharp rise in energy prices caused by the sanctions against Russia.

Until the aggression against Ukraine, Germany was the largest European **buyer** of Russian gas, importing twice as much as Italy, the second on the list of importers. Despite the cessation of gas pipeline imports, Germany continued to be a significant importer of Russian LNG, even though it did not use its ports.

However, a return to Russian suppliers is virtually impossible, at least not anywhere near the previous volumes. Moreover, a possible economic thaw between Europe and Russia is linked to a number of preconditions, above all the achievement of an acceptable peace in Ukraine, all of which will take a long time.

Therefore, the return to nuclear power remains an option in the strategy of the German conservatives, despite many limitations.

Strengthening the European nuclear camp

This change of course compared to the time of Angela Merkel has encouraged the proponents of nuclear power throughout Europe. They see the German shift as bringing the economically strongest supporter of nuclear power plants into their camp.

With the new government in Berlin, this bloc will have two of the strongest EU economies, Germany and France, and therefore a far more influential voice in the European institutions

where the common energy strategy is being worked out.

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With the closure of its nuclear power plants, Germany has so far been at the forefront of the European anti-nuclear circle. But with the new policy of the conservatives who will form the government, there is a strong tailwind for those in favour of greater reliance on nuclear energy.

"It could be the tipping point to stop this ideological dispute," an unnamed pro-nuclear European diplomat **told** Politico.

In this respect, the joint pro-nuclear stance of the European states, which will now include Germany, will have a much bigger effect on making nuclear energy look more "green" in European documents and thus receive important incentives.

The European nuclear industry group "Nucleareurope" **welcomed** the fact that the European Commission has adopted a "technology-neutral approach" in the recently published drafts of the Clean Industrial Deal and the Action Plan for Affordable Energy, strategic documents for the energy transition.

"Many of the ideas outlined in the two documents apply to both nuclear and renewables," said Yves Desbazeille, Nucleareurope Director General.

Reconciling economic and green priorities

Germany's return to nuclear energy cannot happen quickly, as it involves enormous investment and is a long-term process. Regulatory hurdles and the widespread anti-nuclear sentiment among voters further hinder it.



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On the other hand, Germans' priorities **shifted** significantly during the last election campaign, with the cost of living and energy prices clearly outweighing the concern for green goals that previously dominated.

"Climate action is taking a back seat compared to industrial action, as Germany pushes to reposition its economic and industrial model," said Olivia Lazard, Senior Research Fellow at Carnegie Europe.

Giving nuclear energy a chance is therefore an important task for the future government to fulfil the expectations of Germans; it can also be a bridge to reconcile expectations for economic growth and the achievement of green goals.