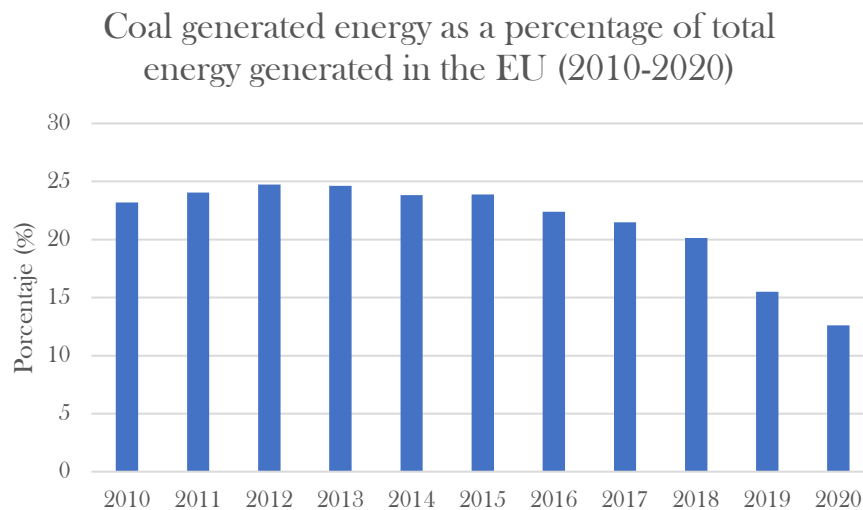


THE EUROPEAN DILEMMA

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The European Union has presented itself as the primary driver of action against climate change. In addition to joining various global initiatives such as the Paris Agreement, European countries have created plans to tackle climate problems and improve the quality of life of their citizens. However, Europe has its tail on the chopping block, and that weakness lies in an ore.

The so-called European Green Deal sets out a series of climate, energy, transport and fiscal proposals that aim to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030. Given that almost 75% of European emissions come from energy production and consumption, the Green Deal plans to decarbonise the European Union.



Fuente: OBELA con datos de Eurostat.

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Getting rid of coal is not an easy task. As we can see in the graph, while coal consumption for energy production has declined during the second decade of the 21st century, it is still a critical fossil fuel for the region, accounting for just over 12% of total energy production.

Eastern European countries are the most dependent on coal. According to Eurostat data, Poland and Estonia are at a crossroads because these two countries are 70% or more dependent on minerals for energy production. The Czech Republic and Bulgaria will also have trouble moving away from coal as their energy production depends on it by 45% and 39%, respectively.

The European Commission created a timetable to inform when each country in the region would move away from coal. Slovakia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland and Italy plan to abandon coal within the next three years. Germany, Spain, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Romania, Croatia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia will do so between 2030 and 2034. On the other hand, Belgium, Cyprus, Latvia, Estonia, Austria, Sweden, Malta, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Portugal have already left. However, Bulgaria will do so until 2039, and Poland remains undecided.

No doubt, the pandemic posed a challenge to the energy supply, but the real problem came when the Russian-Ukrainian conflict broke out in early 2022. When the EU imposed economic sanctions on Russia, it turned off the gas tap that supplied much of the continent, leading Europe to see the limits of its green policy.

To cope, Europeans prepared themselves to reduce their gas consumption to avoid plunging into an energy crisis, but this decision forced them to return to the consumption of the controversial mineral. Calling it a bitter but necessary step, Germany has switched to coal-fired power plants and cut gas deliveries from Gazprom, the Russian gas company. It may mean goodbye to the 2030 decarbonisation target, as Germany considered using gas as a stepping stone between decarbonisation and renewables.

In addition, the Netherlands, Austria, the UK, France and Italy also announced that they would have to use more coal to replace Russian gas. Workers in Austria reactivated the Mellach coal plant; in France, the Government halted the closure of the last Saint Avold

plants; and in the UK, the Netherlands and Italy, official restrictions on coal-fired power generation were lifted.

Even when the reactivation of coal-fired power plants in Europe may be temporary, the impact on the environment will be enormous, halt the energy transition, and erase the few environmental advances the European Union has achieved. Oil is one of the most polluting fossil fuels (if not the most polluting), and its consumption will only bring us closer to the temperature rise limit of the Paris Agreement.

Already fragile environmental protection is further undermined by war, making it clear that climate change is not a priority in decision-making. While emerging countries suffer more frequently from the consequences of environmental degradation, rich countries fight without regard for the impact on the planet and life on it. This is the time to accelerate the energy transition and not go back to more polluting times.