



Denmark's Climate Ambitions and Experience May Help Shape Europe's Energy Transition

Kinga Dudzińska

The Danish presidency of the Council of the EU is focusing its priorities on climate issues. Denmark assumes that the green transition is a key element in strengthening Europe's competitiveness. However, in September this year, Member States tried and failed to agree on an interim target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Growing scepticism among them to the transition points to a slowdown in the implementation of climate policy.

The lack of agreement on EU reduction targets complicates the implementation of the main objectives of the Danish presidency, including progress on the green transition. On 18 September, the EU was to decide on interim emission reduction targets as part of its five-year plans (until 2035 and 2040), to which it committed itself in the 2015 Paris Agreement. The president of the European Commission intended to present a common position at the UN General Assembly and during the COP30 summit in Belém, Brazil, in November. Disagreements prevented a consensus from being reached, and ultimately only a "statement of intent" was prepared, setting an indicative target for 2035 of a 66.25% to 72.5% reduction in emissions compared to 1990 levels. An additional challenge for Denmark is the growing scepticism within the EU regarding climate policy. A growing number of countries, mainly from Central Europe, are demanding greater flexibility in the EU's climate policy, citing the dynamic international situation and growing economic competition from the U.S. and China. This is a critical moment for the EU in the context of the long-term energy and climate transformations.

Green Goals. Denmark intends to maintain the EU's position as a global leader in climate action, as it recognises the green transition and electrification using renewable energy sources (RES) as factors spurring economic growth and strengthening the EU's security. Therefore, at the beginning of July this year, it supported the EC's ambition to reduce emissions by 90% by 2040. This resonates, for example, with a report by the European Environment Agency (EEA) that

identified Europe as the fastest warming continent, especially dire in the context of this year's devastating fires in Europe. The presidency is therefore focusing on the implementation of the Green Deal, including the decarbonisation of industry, access to needed critical raw materials, the energy transition, and the provision of affordable energy. Denmark links the EU's independence with increasing energy security and points to the need to quickly abandon Russian raw materials, which corresponds, among other things, to the 19th package of sanctions, including [ending Russian LNG supplies to the EU](#) by 2027—earlier than planned.

Denmark also emphasises that limiting energy imports means increasing its own renewables generation capacity. This requires accelerating the expansion and modernisation of electricity grids, including cross-border connections that improve the flexibility of the system in Europe. Meanwhile, in the EU the deficit in transmission network investment plans for 2025-2029 is estimated at around €250 billion. It is also necessary to secure the system, especially with growing proportions of variable sources (e.g., wind power). Another challenge is to [lessen the risk of blackouts, such as the one that occurred on the Iberian Peninsula](#) in April this year. That is why Denmark is involved in the preparations of the [Package on electricity networks](#) planned for the end of this year, emphasising the need to simplify regulations and speed up the issuance of permits at various stages of project implementation.

Danish Energy Policy. The Danish EU presidency's programme indicates an attempt to transfer its own experiences in the energy and climate sector, both model solutions and challenges, to the EU forum. At the national level, the government is focusing on reducing emissions (70% by 2030) and plans to achieve climate neutrality by 2045, given the impossibility of backtracking on decisions already made (what it calls the *no backsliding* principle). Denmark's goal is to phase out fossil fuels in electricity production (the Danish company Ørsted closed its last large coal-fired power plant in 2024). This also applies to heating (based mainly on cogeneration, which is the combined production of energy and heat) and transport (accounting for 30% of final energy consumption). The government anticipates further growth in RES, even though they are already almost double the EU average (88% compared to 47%).

Support will come, for example, from the CCS Fund–CO₂ capture (€3.6 billion between 2029 and 2044), as well as an energy storage development programme. The system is to be balanced by a return to nuclear energy, including the development of small modular reactors (SMRs), which requires a 1985 ban to be lifted and is another example in Europe (after Sweden) of a change in position. Climate protection and the energy transition in Denmark are being achieved through the use of innovative solutions. In terms of regulation, this includes an agricultural emissions tax, which will come into force in 2030 (with a target of around €40 per tonne of CO₂ in 2035). In November 2024, the government also presented an innovative plan—a “green tripartite agreement” promoting sustainable solutions in high-emission agriculture. It also plans intensive reforestation (one-sixth of agricultural land, or about 250,000 hectares) and land re-naturalisation. The authorities also support green exports and the development of new technologies (energy conversion such as P2X, the production of green hydrogen and synthetic fuels) and promote Danish companies (Ørsted is a global leader in the construction of offshore wind farms).

EU Climate Policy at a Crossroads. Despite Denmark's determination to pursue the EU's climate ambitions, arguments for climate pragmatism and greater nuance in the energy transition are being raised not only by Central European countries but also by France and even Germany. The discussion regarding the EU's future energy mix, including the status of nuclear energy and the share of gas (import diversification after the complete elimination of supplies from Russia, including LNG), is consistent with this trend. Therefore, the Danish presidency supports so-called flexibilities proposed by the European Commission, that is, tools that can improve emission reductions during the

transition period (e.g., international emissions trading system, consideration of national circumstances and social costs, the principle of the just transition, land use specificity).

At the same time, Member States are awaiting implementing provisions for further transformation, including the electrification of industry and provisions specifying the financing conditions [announced by the Clean Industry Deal \(CID\)](#), such as state aid and EU support. Although these issues go beyond climate policy, they strongly influence it. That is why in September this year, only six countries, representing less than a fifth of the EU population (including Denmark), unreservedly supported the ambitious emission-reduction targets. Controversy over the unconditional implementation of climate targets is also reflected in public sentiment. Currently, according to Eurobarometer surveys, 37% of respondents indicate that the Union's priority should be defence and security, followed by the economy, competitiveness, and industry (32%). Energy independence was indicated by 27% of respondents, and climate protection by only 17%.

Conclusions and Prospects. The Danish presidency's ambition is to restore the rapid pace of EU climate action, also in view of the preparations for COP30. Although Denmark exemplifies this approach as a pioneer in the use of RES in energy production, this does not mean that the Danish solutions can be easily adapted on an EU scale. It is difficult because, on the one hand, the EU is implementing pro-climate but controversial emissions trading rules (ETS2), and on the other, it wants to ensure competitiveness and support domestic industry by implementing the CID. This approach is a challenge for Central European countries, including Poland, but it also raises concerns in France and Germany.

At the same time, Member States can expect greater flexibility from the Danish presidency in the process of reaching a climate compromise. This stems, first, from a shift in Denmark's perception of Europe's security situation (for example, Denmark supports strengthening the EU's defence capabilities, which requires significant investment), and second, from its scepticism of the Donald Trump administration (even though transatlantic relations are key to the Danish government's policy). In the face of these challenges, the EU's current climate-friendly agenda will lose support and require adaptation. However, Denmark's holistic approach to the energy transition, including the experience of domestic companies in international cooperation, offers an opportunity for the intensive development of green technologies in Europe. Denmark's experience in managing renewable energy is also valuable because this area remains one of the main challenges to Poland in modernising its energy sector.