



Acceleration of Climate Policy and the Energy Transformation in Slovakia

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The Eduard Heger government wants to increase the production of energy from renewable sources and nuclear energy. This is evidenced among others by the preparations for the commissioning of two new units of the Mochovce nuclear power plant. Although Visegrad Group states include pronouncements they plan to use nuclear power in their national energy mixes, the difference in those mixes limits the possibilities of formulating regional climate policy and results in a lack of coherence on the EU forum. Hydrogen fuel, the use of which is growing in Slovakia, also remains an untapped potential for regional cooperation.

In Slovakia, there is a political consensus around the main elements of climate and energy policy. The development of nuclear energy while moving away from coal has the support of the majority of parliamentary groups. The government's actions aimed at combating climate change are approved by President Zuzana Čaputová, who was an environmental activist before becoming a politician. At the same time, the percentage of Slovakia's inhabitants declaring personal involvement in counteracting climate change is growing the most among the EU countries (in 2015-2021, it increased by 29 percentage points to 72%).

Slovak Energy Mix. Slovakia is striving to increase the dominance of nuclear energy in the national energy mix. This is evidenced by the approval in May this year of the Nuclear Regulatory Authority (ÚJD) for fuel loading and operation of a third unit at the Mochovce power plant. In turn, the construction of its fourth block is at 90%. Already at this stage, nuclear energy constitutes the largest part of Slovakia's national energy structure—about 55%. According to the government's announcements, after the commissioning of the new blocks, this percentage could increase to about 70%, [similar to France](#), which is the EU's leader in this area.

In recent years, the production of energy from renewable sources in Slovakia has been growing the most among the V4 countries. The share of renewable sources (mainly hydropower and wind farms) in the gross final energy

consumption in 2019 amounted to about 18%. This means that the EU 2020 target for this country at the level of 14% has been more than met. It also shows that Slovakia is already close to implementing the EC guidelines for 2030 of 19.2% renewable sources.

The increase in renewable and nuclear energy production is to be compensated for by abandoning coal, which amounts to about 11% of Slovakia's energy mix. According to the government's plans, coal-fired power plants, as well as lignite mines, are to be closed by 2023 (with one exception). This is an acceleration of the move away from emission-intensive energy sources. The earlier caesura was set for 2030.

Heger's government also aims to support hydrogen-based energy. This is the case for, among others, the automotive production sector, which is of key importance for the Slovak economy. The aim to offer hydrogen-fuelled cars, which tangibly includes support for the hydrogen technology centre in Košice, is to be defined in the "national hydrogen strategy" (already adopted by the Slovak parliament and approved by the government). The document assumes, among other things, hydrogen production in nuclear power plants and the construction of a railway line with hydrogen-fuelled locomotives.

Slovakia's Ambitions for the Use of EU Funds. PM Heger presents the EU's climate goals—including a 55% reduction in

emissions by 2030—as one of his cabinet’s priorities. He wants to achieve a further emissions reduction with EU subsidies, for example, from the Recovery Fund, the core of which—[the Recovery and Resilience Facility \(RRF\)](#)—is expected to support environmental goals. Slovakia intends to allocate 43% of the monies allocated to it from this fund, which amounts to €2.2 billion, to the green transformation. Thus, Slovakia’s recovery and resilience plan, approved in June this year by the European Commission (EC), exceeds the minimum requirement (37%), as well as the plans of Lithuania (38%) and Slovenia (42%), although it is less ambitious, for example, than Austria’s (59%). The funds in Slovakia are intended to support, among others, investments in low-emission transport (€712 million), including the development of alternative-fuel charging stations and the modernisation of railways. According to the Slovak government, the implementation of key emission reduction projects is also to contribute to the recovery of the economy after the pandemic.

Due to changes in the national energy mix, Slovakia can boast of high dynamics of emissions reduction. In backing it, the Heger government aims to combine the priorities contained in the government’s programme with the possibility of obtaining EU support for citizens. One example is the transfer of €528 million from the Slovak recovery and resilience plan for the modernisation of at least 30,000 single-family houses to improve their energy efficiency.

Although Slovakia, [unlike Czechia](#) or Poland, does not have numerous coal mining areas, the transformation of the Upper Nitra lignite mining area is a challenge for the local and central authorities. Heger’s government sees a chance for further transforming such areas through the “just transformation fund”, from which it wants to raise €459 million. The challenge for Slovakia, which has traditionally used EU funds ineffectively, will be the implementation of the reconstruction plan and the timely management of the RRF grants by 2026.

Slovakia’s Approach to Gas. The country remains fully dependent on gas imports from Russia. New north-south connections will contribute to the diversification of gas supplies and will ensure the possibility of gas transmission from, for example, the LNG terminal in Świnoujście, Poland, or via Baltic Pipe. At the same time, they will strengthen Slovakia’s position in its gas price negotiations with Russia. The opening of the gas pipeline between Strachocin and Veľké Kapušany is scheduled for the first quarter of 2022. In turn, from the south, Slovakia is to be supplied with gas as part of the Eastring project, co-created with Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. Although Slovakia is one of the less-active members of the Three Seas Initiative (TSI), it has proposed including this connection on this regional cooperation platform’s list of priority investments.

Slovakia presents an ambiguous approach to the Nord Stream 2 (NS2) gas pipeline. On the one hand, it maintains its readiness to obtain gas from the pipeline but, on the other hand, the Heger government articulates its criticism of this investment more vocally than the [previous cabinets of the social-democratic SMER](#). The change in the Slovak position is due both to the right-wing coalition’s more sceptical approach to cooperation with Russia and to concerns about disrupted gas transfers from the east. They are all the more justified after statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June this year, in which he, whilst arguing for the completion of NS2, undermined the economic viability of transporting gas through Ukraine and Slovakia.

Conclusions and Perspectives. In the next few years, Slovakia will most likely abandon coal mining and increase nuclear energy production. Thanks to this change, it wants to maintain the high reductions of emissions-intensive energy sources. However, while in the 1990s Slovakia’s steep decline in these sources was associated with intensive deindustrialisation, it is currently motivated by EU climate policy. With the help of EU funds, including from the RRF, Slovakia will certainly continue to hit or exceed the EU targets, such as the share of renewable energy in the national energy mix. The Slovak public’s support for counteracting climate change means that the government has not encountered significant resistance when deciding, for example, to close mines.

Differences in the national mixes of energy production and, consequently in the approaches to climate and energy issues, limit cooperation within the Visegrad Group in this field as well as the coordination of activities of its members within the EU. The common element in the V4 states’ policies is the interest in investments in nuclear energy. Manifestation of their support within a wider coalition of states was a letter from V4 prime ministers with the leaders of France, Slovenia, and Romania, to the EC in March this year.

Hydrogen will continue to play an increasingly important role in bilateral and regional cooperation. Slovakia is trying to support the development of this fuel through the V4. This is evidenced by the co-organisation of a conference on hydrogen technologies in the Visegrad countries in May this year. Although, contrary to announcements, it has not been possible to develop a V4 strategy regarding their use so far, the development of cooperation in this area is to be carried out by a Visegrad group of experts, a panel planned to be created in the second half of this year. The discussion of the use of hydrogen was also announced by Prime Minister Heger during his first visit to Poland in June in the context of the planned autumn joint meeting of the governments of Poland and Slovakia. Consultations in this area would correspond to the growing importance of hydrogen in the EU, confirmed by the adoption in July last year of the [EC’s hydrogen strategy](#).