



Written by [James Murphy](#) on June 21, 2022

Germany Set to Fire Up Coal Plants Due to Projected Natural Gas Shortage

When Russian gas firm Gazprom announced last Thursday that it was cutting natural-gas supplies delivered to Germany through the Nord Stream 1 pipeline due to technical problems, the news clearly put a dent in the German government's plan to follow the "greenest" policies possible. On Sunday, Federal Economics and Climate Protection Minister Robert Habeck announced that the nation would have to turn to that "dirtiest" of fossil fuels, coal, to help meet the energy needs of the country.



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The Russian squeeze on natural gas necessitates that Germany use less of the relatively "clean" fossil fuel. A law that will allow the government to use replacement power plants — such as coal fired plants — is currently making its way through the Bundesrat. It is expected to be passed as early as July 8, at which point it will come into force quickly.

Habeck, a member of Germany's Green Party, which helped to form a left-wing coalition government last December, called it a "bitter" decision.

"With the law, we are setting up a gas replacement reserve on demand. And I can already say: We will call off the gas replacement reserve as soon as the law comes into force. That means, to be honest, more coal-fired power plants for a transitional period. That's bitter, but in this situation it's almost necessary to reduce gas consumption," Habeck said in a [statement](#).

When the law — the Replacement Power Plant Availability Act — is in place, a gas-replacement reserve will be set up for a limited period, specified as until March 31, 2024. Germany seeks to maintain a strategic reserve of natural gas. Currently, the reserves are approximately 57-percent full. The government wishes for those reserves to be full for the winter months.

"We must and we will do everything we can to store as much gas as possible in summer and autumn. The gas storage tanks must be full in winter. That has top priority," said Habeck.

Habeck blames the gas-supply situation on a well-known bogeyman — Vladimir Putin.

"The tense situation and high prices are a direct consequence of Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine. There is no mistake. What's more, it's obviously Putin's strategy to unsettle us, drive up prices and divide us. We won't allow that. We defend ourselves resolutely, precisely and thoughtfully," the minister said.



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Habeck warned of a potentially brutal coming winter should the gas-storage issue not be rectified quickly: “Otherwise, it will be really tight in winter.”

In an effort to promote industrial gas consumers to use less of the reliable fuel, the German government plans to launch a gas-auction model. The plan is meant to create an auction-type system for industrial gas use that “is intended to ensure that as many gas quantities as possible are available for any bottleneck situations in the coming winter,” according to the Federal Economics and Climate Protection Ministry’s statement.

“This creates an incentive to reduce consumption in industry so that more is available for storage. This is urgently needed. Everything that we consume less helps. Industry is a key factor here,” said Habeck.

The Social Democrats and the Greens currently lead Germany’s coalition government, along with the FDP or Free Democratic Party. Some in the FDP have proposed another way to lessen Germany’s dependence on Russian natural gas — fracking.

Fracking, of course, is a method of extracting oil, natural gas, geothermal energy, or water from deep underground. Green crusaders have long regarded the process of extremely hazardous to the environment.

However, the FDP’s parliamentary director, Torsten Herbst, recently told newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* that such concerns were no longer valid. Herbst and others in the FDP have called for the German government to reconsider its ban on fracking in light of the natural-gas supply problem.

“As scientific studies show, under modern security standards fracking causes no relevant environmental damage,” Herbst said.

What are the chances that the rest of the left-wing German government will heed Herbst’s advice?

When the new German government was formed in late 2021, it was hailed (mainly by itself) to be the “[greenest](#)” government yet. Now, only a half-year later they’re getting ready to open up “dirty” coal-fired power plants in order to meet the nation’s energy needs.



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