

Europe Spars Over Its Own Green Deal as Germany Urges Prudence



The opening round of talks over the next green deal in Europe highlighted differences between governments over the means and pace of transforming the continent's economies to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Germany sounded caution as energy ministers from member states debated a proposal to aim for net-zero emissions from the bloc by the middle of the century. Governments differed on issues including the pace of emissions cuts and the energy sources and technologies to rely upon, while many stressed the importance of preserving jobs and competitiveness.

"Germany wants to ensure that Europe remains a pioneer in the future and that we see climate strategy as a major opportunity for all countries," Thomas Bareiss, a deputy economy and energy minister, told his counterparts at their meeting Monday in Brussels.

“Nonetheless, I think it’s important that we acknowledge the major challenges that we face and be responsible in that regard,” he added. “We must ensure growth and well-being for our citizens at the same time as an environmental transition.”

The 28-nation EU, responsible for 10 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions, is planning ahead to give direction to national governments, companies and citizens in fighting global temperature increases. In the next step, EU environment ministers will discuss the blueprint for a transition to an emissions-neutral economy on Tuesday.

The strategy, drafted by the European Commission in November, is aimed at showing how determined the bloc is to honor the Paris climate accord’s targets, even in the face of President Donald Trump’s decision to take the U.S. out of the 2015 agreement signed by almost all other countries.

In his latest comments on climate, Trump said on Saturday that the so-called Green New Deal to phase out fossil fuels, championed by first-term Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, would “destroy American energy” and boost his 2020 campaign.

Even though Europe has been traditionally a more committed advocate of environmental protection than the U.S., Monday’s meeting in Brussels showed that governments don’t take the costs of transition lightly. The bloc must ensure that it also provides prosperity in order to be able to convince other partners in the world to follow suit, Bareiss said.

“We must not forget when discussing details that there’s an overarching strategy that cannot be forgotten and it’s sometimes better to take slower steps forward so that we don’t forget the bigger picture,” he said.