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EUROPEAN COAL POWER OUTPUT SEES 'UNPRECEDENTED' DECLINE

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EurActiv (25 November 2019)

Electricity production from coal is on track to fall by around 3% globally in 2019 [] the largest drop on record [] with Western European countries leading the charge, according to fresh data published on Monday (25 November).

The European Union has seen an unprecedented <u>—</u> year-on-year decline <u>—</u> in coal-fired power generation in the first half of 2019, according to data published by Carbon Brief, a climate analysis and news website.

Western European countries are leading the charge, with coal use falling 22% year-on-year in Germany, and up to 79% in Ireland.

Coal represented less than 2% of the electricity mix in Ireland, France and $\square \square$ UK \square and only 6% in Spain and Italy, across the first half of 2019. In May, the UK even switched off all its coal plants for two weeks, a first since the industrial revolution began.

And the trend is accelerating in the second half of the year to an estimated 23% fall in 2019, according to Carbon Brief.

UK breaks coal-free power generation record by huge margin

Coal has historically been at the cornerstone of the UKs electricity mix, but the first three months of 2019 saw the electricity grid clock up 650 hours of coal-free generation [] more than was achieved during the entirety of 2017. EURACTIVs media partner edie.net reports.

Half renewables, half gas

In Europe, the fall is primarily attributed to the EUs carbon cap-and-trade system, the Emissions Trading Scheme. Prices on the EU carbon market have risen from around in 2017 to around in per tonne of CO2 emitted in 2019, pushing coal plants to halt production.

Its basically down to the EU ETS, said Simon Evans, deputy editor at Carbon Brief. Thats the main driver for people not to run their coal plants at full power, he told EURACTIV.

Other factors include the expansion of wind and solar power, energy efficiency measures, and the availability of gas power capacity to replace coal, Evans said.

In Europe, around half the fall in coal reflects the impact of new wind and solar, Carbon Brief said, while the other half is due to a switch from coal to gas.

Decline slower in Central and Eastern Europe

The fall in coal power output is much smaller in Central and Eastern Europe, however. This is due to near-zero installations of wind and solar plants as well as limited gas capacity to replace coal, the study found.

The coal-gas switch has happened as the carbon price in the EU Emissions Trading System rose above import to be cheaper than coal throughout 2019.

But because few new gas plants are being built in Europe, further coal-gas switching will be constrained in subsequent years, Carbon Brief said.

Coal-to-gas switching does cut CO2, Evans acknowledged, but its a one time improvement, he cautioned. Countries aiming for carbon neutrality have to go beyond that with a combination of energy efficiency measures to reduce consumption and renewables, he told EURACTIV.

In the future, wind and solar are expected to be the driving factor displacing not only coal generation but also output from gas, Carbon Brief said [] as long as demand growth remains flat or negative.

Renewable energies chip away at coal power, stats show

New wind, solar and biomass power generation displaced hard coal last year Germany, France and the UK according to a 2018 review of European electricity statistics by two leading energy policy think tanks.

China, India and the US

Elsewhere, the study noted a flattening of coal growth in China and a sharp turnaround in India, where coal power output is on track to fall for the first time in at least three decades.

The reasons for drop vary from country to country but include increased electricity generation from renewables, nuclear and gas, as well as slowing or negative power demand growth.

In North America, about 60% of the fall in coal came from switching to gas, as coal plants closed and new gas plants opened.

[Edited by Zoran Radosavljevic]