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Article

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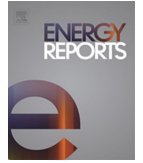
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Policies on renewable energy at the European and national level of governance: Assessing policy adaptation in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The European Union defined itself as a global leader in the promotion and development of renewable energy sources. The European Union initiated crucial changes in renewable energy policies in its Member States. This paper presents the results of a comprehensive analysis of policy debate and policy outputs adopted by the European Union and by the Czech Republic over a fourteen-year period (2004–2018). We investigate how the Czech Republic's domestic policy on renewable energy sources has reacted to EU-level policy norms, strategies and institutional developments. There are different theories used to explain differentiated processes of Europeanization of domestic structures. One of them, the institutionalist approach reveals how the European Union effect is filtered and mediated through pre-existing domestic institutions, rules, norms and political cultures. We demonstrate that Czech policy makers implemented crucial EU-level policy norms to the national legislative framework, but these norms have not been fully internalized by political actors and society. Thus, the promotion of renewable energy sources in the Czech Republic can be considered as a direct effect of policy development at the EU level, not as output of autonomous Czech policy debate. It poses certain risk for the future development of renewable energy sources policy support. © 2019 Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license

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Keywords: Czech republic; Europeanization; Legislative adaptation; Normative adaptation; Renewable energy policy

1. Introduction

Renewable energy is one of the key cross-cutting issues addressed by the European Union's policies. The European Union and its Member States have become a global leader in renewable energy sources (RES) development and implementation [1]. As a result, within the European Union's policies, the RES and their support are strongly anchored in the form of strategies, development goals and priorities, as well as binding legislation.

The Czech Republic belongs to the group of Central and Eastern European Member States, which do not act very actively on RES issues [2]. The Czech Republic certainly cannot be counted among the so-called green countries.

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Traditional dependence on fossil fuels and strong political support for nuclear energy [3] find themselves in a tension with the standards and commitments that are generated by the European Union's political system. The Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004, thus when environmental policy was already formed and developed in the European Union. In the Czech Republic, the protection of the environment, which includes the agenda of RES, is one of the areas where the structured and institutionalized policy begins to develop approximately a decade after the democratic transition in 1989. Neither the political actors nor the civil society seemed to be interested in the issue of RES or environmental protection in general during the 1990s [4]. Topics related to political and economic transformation dominated the policy debate. In this period, there was a fundamental difference between the institutionalization of renewable energy policy at the level of the European Union and the Czech Republic. Following the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union, renewable energy policy has dynamically developed and institutionalized. The question therefore arises to what extent it is the result of the process of Europeanization of policy in the area of renewable energy policy and to what extent it is an output of domestic policy change. In other words, we can ask if the proliferation of RES in the Czech Republic is the result (1) of systemic change driven by decisions undertaken at the EU level of governance or (2) of policy decisions made at the level of the Czech Republic and stemming from the policy debate among relevant political actors and streamlined by strong interest of public. We can also ask if new policy norms have been internalized by political actors. Answering those questions is the main goal of research whose results are presented in this paper. We seek to confirm two assumptions: We expect that EU-level policy norms on RES advancement were crucial steering factor of policy development in the Czech Republic. We also expect that Czech society and political actors responsible for taking the decisions have never fully internalized those policy norms.

The time frame of the analysis was set for the period between 2004 (year of the Czech Republic joining the European Union) and 2018. Two datasets were analyzed. We provided the content analysis of policy debates in Czech Chamber of Deputies with the aim to identify complex policy debates on RES. Those debates were comprehensively analyzed with special focus on the role of EU-level policy norms. The second dataset subjected to analysis consisted of EU-level and Czech strategic and legislative policy documents concerning RES issued within the period under review.

The paper consists of five sections. After introduction, second section indicates the position of RES in the Czech Republic energy production. The third section presents the policy debate on RES in the core arena of Czech policy-making, the House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. The fourth section summarizes the results of the comparative analysis of EU legislative and strategic policy documents and Czech legislative and strategic policy documents issued in the period under review. The main findings are summarized and discussed in the conclusion.

2. Renewable energy sources in the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic inherited the conception of the energy policy from the era of non-democratic regime of Czechoslovakia, one of the satellite countries of the Soviet Union. In those days, the energy production system was based on coal mines and power plants situated mostly in the South-West Czechoslovakia. Since 1980s, thermal power plants were complemented by the launching of the nuclear power plants (Dukovany in 1985, Temelín in 2000). Other sources of energy remain rather marginal. In 2018, thermal and nuclear power plants had 69% share of installed capacity of electricity sources [5]. Czech politicians and the majority of the society consider the use of coal as a significant comparative advantage of the Czech Republic, which provides an adequate level of energy security. While RES are seen as a risky investment with a low rate of return from an energy security perspective, the fossil fuels combined with nuclear energy are considered to be less risky “status quo” option.

Until the accession to the European Union in 2004, the only relevant RES used in the Czech Republic were water energy sources. The most of them have been installed as a parts of water flow regulation projects of Vltava river in 1950s and 1960s. The idea of construction the dams on Vltava and other Czechoslovakian river was not originally connected with energy production. Initial purposes were regulating the river flow and providing water supply for Prague and other cities. Energy production was seen as a by-product of those projects. Other types of RES were marginal or almost non-existent until 2004.

The proliferation of RES after 2004 was based on newly established policies supporting RES installation and operation. In 2005, the systemic support for RES installation and operation was established by Act No. 180/2005 Coll. (2005) [6]. The Act specified the conditions of subsidies for RES installations and scheme of guaranteed prices for all types of RES which started to be used mostly for biomass proliferation. Apart from general framework, the

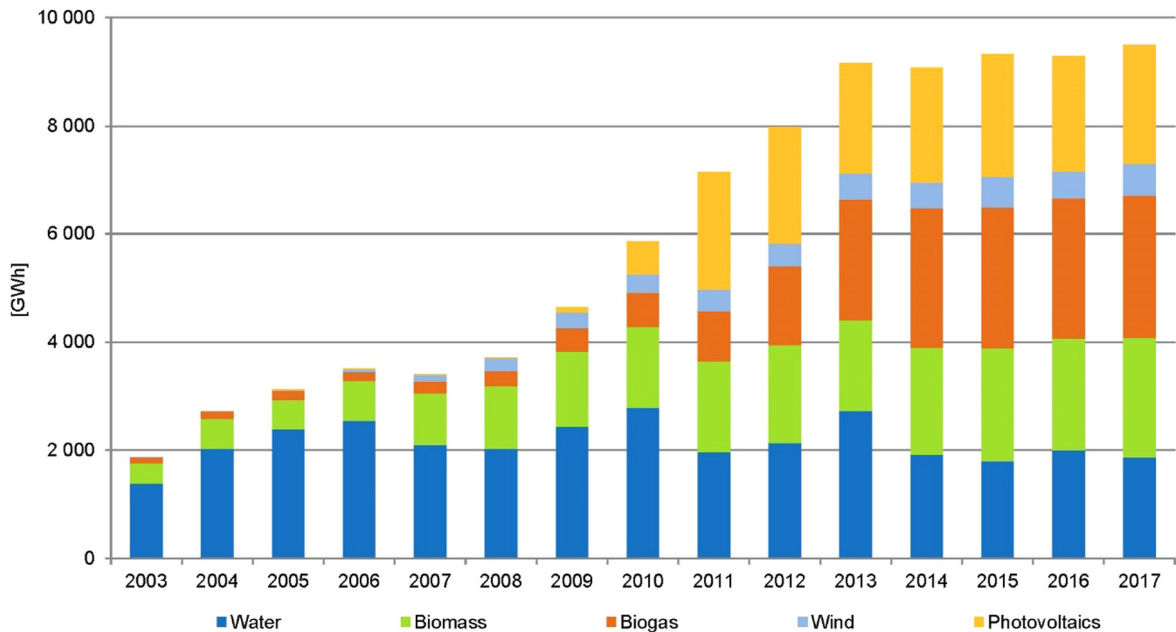


Fig. 1. Development of installed capacity of RES in the Czech Republic (based on data available at [7]).

Act also specified even more favorable conditions for photovoltaics installations. These started to be massively used after the prices of photovoltaics technologies dropped-down in 2008–2010 (caused mostly by Chinese import of technologies). The mechanisms created to support the installation of new RES (especially photovoltaic power plants) have been used by business sector to secure rapid and sure return on investment. It can be stated that very favorable conditions of support (price reduction of technologies, high purchase prices of produced electricity, mandatory purchase provisions) attracted a large amount of speculative capital. As can be seen in Fig. 1, years 2010 and 2011 brought a boom in photovoltaics installations and also caused the rise of electricity prices. This became the subject of extensive public criticism. Negative connotation, specifically towards solar RES, continues to exist in a substantial proportion of Czech society to the present day and can at least partly explain a distant attitude to the RES.

3. Policy debate on RES in the Czech Republic

As was mentioned above, the issue of RES had not serious impact in reality until the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union. Correspondingly, it can be argued that public awareness and interest in RES was always limited and stayed limited until these days. Only minority of Czech population (49% of respondents) recognizes the proliferation of RES as an important policy goal. The using RES is usually connected with the fear of rising prices of energy (69% of respondents). Only 41% of respondents find it realistic that RES will replace traditional energy sources [8].

Following the low level of recognition of RES importance by Czech society, it is no surprise that political actors are not generally interested in setting the issues related to RES on official agenda. After reviewing the content of policy debate in Chamber of Deputies, we have found large number of remarks on RES in policy debates on Acts regulating energy production, environmental protection, market behavior or implementing the EU Cohesion Policy funding institutions and processes. However, the real and complex debate on the issue of RES has occurred only several times in the period under review. By the complex policy debate we mean the debate among political actors in Chamber of Deputies which focuses on crucial conceptual and strategic aspects of the use of RES in the Czech Republic. Another key criterion in searching for complex policy debate is that real argumentation and mismatch of opinions has to be present. Within the period under review, the complex policy debate on RES occurred only three

times. The rest of this section summarizes the results of content analysis of these three policy debates (based on stenographic records, available at [9]).

The RES was subjected to complex policy debate in 2004–2005 when discussing the Act No. 180/2005 Coll [6], on the promotion of the use of renewable energy sources. This debate suffered with the lack of clear evidence and knowledge on the side of the deputies. Contributions of the most deputies were based on “story-telling” (about ugly wind power plants, about negative German experiences with RES, about rising prices of bio-mass) or on over-generalization (“we are forced by the EU to shut down the thermal power plants”). As a result, the debate was fragmented and many side-topics were considered. It took more than one year to adopt the abovementioned Act. Overall, the debate was rather negative and cautious towards the RES. The need for Act adoption was seen in implementing the EU directive, as was repeatedly argued from government representatives. The contribution of the Act to environment protection was mentioned only marginally as well as the impact of RES proliferation on Czech energy security. There was an uncontested consensus among deputies on the strategic importance of nuclear energy and coal reserves.

Second complex policy debate on RES occurred in 2012 when Act No. 165/2012 Coll. (2012) [10]. Act on promoted energy sources was discussed. The real purpose of Act adoption was to end the practice of generous subsidies for solar power plants which was established by Act No. 180/2005 Coll [6] and resulted in speculative investments and the increase of the electricity prices. The debate was fundamentally affected by the negative view of RES by the most of discussing deputies (contradictorily to the title of the Act). Again, the pressure for RES proliferation “dictated” by the EU was seen as the main factor affecting the need for the Act. The environmental context was almost absent within the debate. In contrast, the strategic importance of coal reserves was frequently reminded. Also the argumentation considering the nuclear energy as a “clean energy” was repeated several times.

The third complex policy debate on RES took place in 2015 when Act. No. 131/2015 Coll. (2015) [11] amending energy act (adopted in 2000) was discussed in Chamber of Deputies. The processes of control and administering the subsidies for RES were changed. In the context of negative and cautious approach to RES, which was still present in 2015, the intensification of state control over the RES production was positively perceived and welcomed. Several deputies stressed that the support for RES should be limited for decentralized sources with small installed capacity. The argumentation refusing to distort the energy market by subsidies for RES was also present.

We can sum up that RES are usually mentioned as something what has to be or should be supported, without clarifying the reason for such necessity or need. By interpreting context, the source of the need for supporting the RES is in most cases identified in EU regulations and directives. Even proponents and supporters of new norms promoting RES frequently uses the argument that there is no other chance than accept the EU-level policy norms. For both sides (proponents as well as opponents) the reference to EU-level policy norms is used for contradicting counterparty’s arguments.

4. Policy norms on RES in the EU and the Czech Republic

The EU policy norms regarding the use of RES were developed particularly in the last two decades, which in turn, called for adaptation by the Member States. To start with, Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy [12] stated its primary goal as 12% of the energy consumption and 21% of the electricity consumption should be met by RES by 2010 considering increasing their share to 15% by 2015. Europe 2020 Strategy [13] indicated the policy norms as increasing the use of RES and promoting energy efficiency and greater energy security. The Renewable Energy Roadmap (2006) set an overall mandatory target of 20% for the proportion of renewable energy figuring in gross domestic consumption by 2020. Directive 2009/28/EC (2009) [14] of the European Parliament and of the Council confirmed this policy norm by establishing the mandatory target of 20% share of energy from RES to be attained by 2020. Article 3 of Directive 2018/2001 (2018) [15] on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources set a new and binding Union target for the overall share of energy from renewable sources in the Union’s gross final consumption of energy in 2030 as at least 32%.

The Czech Republic transposed the EU policy norms on RES into its strategy papers and legislation particularly in the last decade. The Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development [16] stated its policy target as ‘increasing the proportion of RES to over 10% by 2020 and to about 15% in the longer term’. This policy target is the adoption of the policy target stated in the Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy [12]. This target was furthered by the State Environmental Policy of the Czech Republic [17] which indicated its main policy objective as the fulfillment of 13% contribution of RES on the gross total energy consumption by 2020. The National Action Plan

for Energy from Renewable Sources [18] was prepared based on the Directive 2009/28/EC (2009) [14] and stated its main policy target as the achievement of 13.5% share of energy from RES in gross final consumption. Czech [10] on supported energy sources has transposed the requirements of Directive 2012/27/EU [19] into the national legal system. The act has set the goal of promoting the use of RES and to increase the share of RES in the consumption of primary energy sources to achieve the defined targets. The Strategic Framework Czech Republic [20] adopted the EU policy norms by indicating its primary policy objectives as reducing fossil fuel consumption and increasing the share of renewable or nuclear energy production or from waste. The Czech Republic has not only developed a legislative framework on increasing the use of RES, but also provided financial incentives for public authorities for the implementation of the newly adopted policy norms in this area. The support for soft measures are provided through the Promotion of Energy Savings and the Use of Renewable and Secondary Energy Sources (EFEKT Programme). The Green Savings Program was created in 2009 to provide financial support for the use of RES. It was replaced by the New Green Savings Program in 2013, which was strongly focused on co-financing projects funded by the EU budget. The Operational Programme Environment (2014–2020) also provides financial support from the Cohesion Fund.

This brief analysis indicates that since its EU-membership, the Czech Republic adopted the EU policy norm of increased use of RES into its domestic structure. Normative adaptation has been attained through active use of regulatory instruments (legislation), economic instruments, and awareness-raising actions.

5. Conclusion

The results of analysis show that RES have significantly developed in the Czech Republic after 2004. Installed capacity of RES increased almost five times. At the level of strategic and legislative policy documents, the Czech Republic adopted number of new instruments, accepted new goals in RES proliferation and started to systematically manage the proliferation of RES. On the other hand, these changes were not accompanied by the internalization of new policy norms by the Czech society and political actors. As we have demonstrated, the issue of RES is still perceived as being brought in artificially by the EU regulations and directives. The complex argumentation about the essence of using RES is still mostly absent in the Czech Republic. This can be seen as a serious threat for the future years. So far, the proliferation of RES was financed mostly from external sources (EU funding), thus it was not a serious issue for the Czech political actors in terms of cost and benefit assessment. But EU funding framework is going to be changed next year and it is expected that serious cuts in funding will increase the pressure on finding domestic sources of supporting the RES proliferation. Another risk can be seen in limited period of support for new RES – for most RES installed around 2010 the support will end in the next decade [5]. The willingness of political actors to extend it remains questionable.

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