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Should Germany delay its nuclear exit?



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Nuclear energy not a panacea, but it might help in the current crisis

Nuclear power is like a horror movie from the eighties: you think it's all over. The young couple lies in each other's arms, relieved. Soft music plays. Hands uncurl from the cinema seats. Safe at last. Then, suddenly, a zombie appears in the background again.

Likewise, the intense political and social conflict about the use of nuclear energy in Germany had seemed to have ended for good with the amendment to the Atomic Energy Act passed by a broad parliamentary majority in June 2011. Since then, the share of domestically produced nuclear energy in Germany's electricity generation has dwindled continuously.

At the end of this year, the last remaining reactors are supposed to be taken off the grid. The looming energy crisis in Germany resulting from Putin's power play with gas supplies has reignited the discussion about the continued operation of the three nuclear power plants currently still in operation.

Nuclear power in Germany: no renaissance possible

Whether the nuclear phase-out after the catastrophe in Fukushima was the right thing to do or not is no longer relevant today. Nor should it be discussed any more. After all, a renewed flare-up of the emotional debate that was thought to have been overcome could stand in the way of the pragmatic solutions needed here and now.

What seems certain, however, is that the chapter of nuclear energy in Germany is drawing irretrievably to a close. Not only is there a lack of public support for a rethink on this issue. Above all, there is still a lack of sustainable solutions for dealing with the accumulated radioactive nuclear waste. After the back and

Thanks to Putin, the debate about nuclear power in Germany has been reignited

There will be no renaissance of nuclear energy

forth of nuclear policy in Germany, not even the power industry shows any appreciable appetite for a nuclear future.

It is sometimes argued that nuclear power is a climate-neutral energy source and thus an ideal technology for the transition to an emission-free economy. But the nuclear infrastructure in Germany has already been largely dismantled. Planning, licensing and commissioning new reactors would take longer than the remaining time available to fight the climate crisis. Like in a zombie movie, the undead currently make a brief appearance in the closing credits. But as a rule, these are actually their last twitches.

Keep all options open now

Energy experts point out that Germany is currently affected by a gas supply crisis and not by an electricity crisis. Therefore, nuclear power cannot help here and only accounts for 6% of the electricity supply anyway (from over 25% at the beginning of the century).

All true. But at the same time, the danger remains that the gas crisis will turn into an electricity crisis. It may not be rational, but private households are currently stocking up on fan heaters and the like, presumably with the intention of using these electricity-powered heating devices in winter. In extreme cases, therefore, a supply problem with electricity could not be ruled out. This risk should be reduced as far as possible. Every 6% will help here.

Provided that the reactors can continue to operate beyond the end of the year without increased risk, pragmatism should prevail. And it seems to do so. It demands respect that even the coalition partner whose founding myth lies in the anti-nuclear movement does not seem to categorically rule out a brief extension if it can reduce the risk of a wider energy crisis in the coming winter. In this scary movie, nuclear power will only play a supporting actor. But supporting roles matter. They get Oscars, too.

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The gas crisis
could spill over
into an
electricity crisis

Pragmatism is
needed, not
withdrawing into
the old trenches
