

WHO ARE THE KEY PLAYERS IN ENERGY POLICY IN POLAND? THE ROLE OF INTEREST GROUPS IN ENERGY TRANSITION

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Abstract: *The paper presents an analysis of the role of interest groups in Poland's energy policy in the context of the EU climate and energy policy. The main aim of the analysis is to try to answer the question of who shapes the Polish energy policy, which stakeholders have the greatest impact on, who are the key players, and what kind of interest intermediation system has developed in the energy sector. Poland's energy mix is dominated by coal, which results from the ownership structure in the energy sector, strong influence of conventional (coal) energy companies and centralization of energy policy. The interests of coal energy companies are protected by the government both in Poland and at the EU level. The research puts forward a thesis that Polish energy policy is co-shaped by conventional energy companies, which leads to their monopolistic position and the formation of a neocorporatist model with elements of statism, and the process of illiberal backlash and creeping authoritarianism further strengthens their role. Privileging the interests of the state-owned energy companies hampers the process of energy transition in Poland, which is contrary to the EU's climate and energy policy.*

Keywords: *energy policy, interest groups, Poland, energy transition, neocorporatism, illiberal backsliding.*

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Introduction

In many European countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, energy policy is treated as a key element of the national security. Poland as the other EU member states has to adjust its energy policy to priorities of the EU, but currently it is the most hard-line EU energy and climate policy opponent. Coal has always been the basis of the Polish power system. Currently, a great majority of electricity production (80%) is based on conventional fuels, that is hard coal and lignite, and the coal industry provides 91,000 jobs (National Report of the Energy Regulatory Office, 2021, p. 10).

At the EU level, Poland has blocked, resisted and watered down European legislation on energy transition, defending Polish conventional (coal) energy producers' interests. During negotiations on the EU Energy and Climate Package (2008), EU ETS review, the 2030 climate and energy framework, long-term strategy for a climate-neutral

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Europe by 2050, Poland's government represented and protected interests of Polish conventional (coal) energy companies, not consumers' or renewable energy producers'.

The main aim of the paper is to explore the role and influence of interest groups and the character of interest representation in the Polish energy policy, particularly in the context of the EU energy and climate policy. The research aims to explain the influence of interest groups in the process of formulating and implementing energy policy in Poland. The first set of questions regards the role played by economic interests groups in the Polish energy policy. The main question is what kind of interests dominate in energy policy? Who are the key players? Which interest groups are favoured by political institutions? Which conditions determine the character of interest intermediation system in the energy policy in Poland? Some studies (Ruszkowski 2018, Szulecki 2017) show that the process of policy making in this sector is characterized by regulatory capture and government are designing energy policy that benefits state-owned energy companies. This is not surprising since the energy sector is dominated by the large energy players – state-owned companies. In such situation interests of the "biggest four" are treated as the interest of the state (Szulecki 2017, p.21; Kurczewska 2011, p. 354). Since the public opinion in Poland on climate changes has changed and many ecological associations have become active, we can expect that decision makers will take into consideration ecological interests as well as energy producers' interests. It seems to be obvious after the EU's announcement in 2019 of the European Green Deal.

The second part of the questions concerns interests representation strategies of Polish energy producers at the EU level in the process of formulating the EU energy and climate policy. In many cases we can observe deep cooperation of Poland's government and the coal energy producers that implies neocorporatist traditions (Kurczewska 2011). What kind of strategies of interest representation do Polish conventional energy producers employ at the EU level if the EU interest intermediation system is described as pluralist or elite (or chameleon) pluralist (Cohen 2007; Cohen and Katsaitis 2013)? Do they adjust their national interest representation strategies to requirements of the European lobbying arena?

The third part of the questions concerns the role of interest groups in the times of illiberal backlash and creeping authoritarianism in Poland, when the conservative Law and Justice party took over. Do the concentration and renationalization of companies in the energy sector affect interest representation strategies? It can be assumed that the centralization of power leads to the strengthening of the role of the state conventional energy corporations in the Polish energy policy.

Based on the analysis of the selected legislative processes at national and EU levels (e.g., the Renewable Energy Sources Act, Act on Wind Energy Investments, regulation on the Emissions Trading System) three hypothesis will be verified.

The article is divided into several sections. The first one discusses the current research on interest groups and lobbying in energy policy, as well as presents a theoretical framework of research and a methodological approach. Next, the specificity of the energy policy in Poland was characterized and the dominant role of state-owned energy companies

in this policy was indicated. The next section provides an analysis of renewable energy promotion policies in Poland treated as a threat and an opportunity for state-owned energy companies. Then, strategies of interests representation of Polish conventional energy companies at the EU level were analysed, indicating the neocorporatistic nature of these strategies, and specific features of lobbying of these companies regarding the EU's energy and climate policy were distinguished. Particular attention was paid to the analysis of the privileged position and growing dominance of state-owned companies in energy policy in the times of illiberal backlash and creeping authoritarianism in Poland. The article concludes policy implications.

1. Research on interest groups in energy policy, theoretical framework and methodological approach

The energy policy of Poland or the other EU countries is quite popular with political science researchers. Polish energy policy is analysed mainly in terms of its effectiveness and the state's energy security and its independence from imports of energy sources. The issues of the influence of interest groups in the process of policy formation are very rarely addressed.

As energy policies in CEE countries are subject to accelerated and often painful adaptation to the EU requirements, many studies try to explain the process of their Europeanization (Ancygier 2013; Jankowska & Ancygier 2017; Szulecki *et al.* 2016, Pach-Gurgul 2016)). The studies focus on the process of evolution of Polish renewable energy sources policy (RES) and emphasize the logics of Polish political and organizational fields which influence energy policy, combining political, economic and cultural factors, as well as the EU pressure (Szulecki 2017).

The energy policy in Poland is treated by the authorities as a strategic one, which aims to ensure national security. The problem of excessive securitization of energy policy is also analysed (Szulecki 2020, Lis 2018). Securitization appears to be a mechanism used to protect the interests of the main actors of this policy: the state energy companies. The national security argument is instrumental, and the close relations and dependencies between the government and energy companies lead to 'the symbiosis between the State, those currently in power, a growing circle of elites which includes former government members and opposition politicians, and state-run energy companies – a deeply entrenched coalition which is very difficult to move' (Szulecki 2018, p. 100).

By far the largest part of the studies focuses on the analysis of renewable energy in the electricity sector (Ceglarz & Ancygier 2015; Ancygier 2013; Jankowska 2010), or energy efficiency, mainly due to difficulties in adapting national policies to the EU requirements. The EU law has been crucial in pushing for stronger RES support policies, while the instable domestic political field explains 'the soap opera of renewable energy policy legislation: drafts, new plans, amendments and legal instability' (Szulecki 2017, p. 2). However, this situation results mainly from the structure of the energy sector in Poland and political context.

Using the path-dependency theory, political and economic conditions of the development of the Polish energy sector are analysed and the factors that shaped it are indicated (Jankowska & Ancygier, 2017). The conditions and influence of stakeholders in energy policy-making are analysed to a lesser extent. Yes, there are studies on impact of organized interests in the energy sector in Hungary and the Czech Republic (Horváthová & Dobbins, 2019), in which, on the basis of a comparative analysis of the energy policies concerning the use of nuclear energy in these countries, the authors indicate that policy-making in energy sector is generally conducted in state-industrial circles, where pro-nuclear actors play a key role, while the influence of anti-nuclear advocates is limited. In general, both democracies are open to civil society input, but the possibility of influence in energy policy is more conducive to well organized interests (Horváthová & Dobbins, 2019). Comparative quantitative studies of interest groups in selected sectoral policies in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia (Dobbins & Riedel, 2021) show some trends and growing influence of stakeholders, but without an insightful and analytical explanation of the role of interest groups in energy policy at different stages of the political process.

Taking into account the results of the research presented above, as well as using the theories of interest groups and lobbying, the analysis aims at explaining the role and influence of interest groups in Poland's energy policy and their political and economic conditions. It can be assumed that the possibilities of influence in a given sector's policy are determined by the interests intermediation system (neo-corporatist, pluralist, statist) in a given country. In the systems of most CEE countries, one can find features of neocorporatism (or state-neocorporatism). Also in Poland, there are elements that prove neocorporatism, which is defined as a cooperative relationship between an interest group and the government for the purpose of maintaining a fixed procedure of developing and implementing policies. Streeck and Kenworthy (2005) describe neocorporatism as a system of relationships between the organization of group interests in established intermediary associations (the structural aspect of neocorporatism) and the political coordination between interest associations and the state (the functional aspect) (Streeck and Kenworthy, 2005, p. 448). In the Polish energy policy, the key actors in the decision-making process are the government and state-owned energy companies, which are linked by networks of connections and mutual dependencies. Therefore, a hypothesis is made in the research:

H1: The networks of links and dependencies between the government and state-owned conventional energy concerns lead to a privileged position for coal energy producers, which indicates the neocorporatist interest intermediation system. Polish energy policy is co-shaped by coal energy producers, which leads to a halt in the energy transformation process.

Polish energy policy must take into account the objectives of the EU climate and energy policy. If interest groups, including state-owned energy companies, want to contribute to shaping energy policy, they must also defend their interests at EU level. Comparative studies of lobbying strategies (Kohler-Koch *et al.*, 2013; pp. 25-26) show that business interests groups adapt their national strategies of interest representation to the

requirements of the European lobbying arena, which is characterized as pluralist (Streeck & Schmitter 1991), elite pluralist (Coen, 2007), semi-pluralist (Eising, 2007) or chameleon pluralist (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013). As there is no tradition of pluralism in the Polish energy sector, it can be assumed that the strategies for representing the interests of energy concerns at the EU level are not being modified and still assume close relations with the government.

H2: Representation of the interests of the Polish energy sector at the EU level is based on close cooperation with the government and has a neocorporatist character despite the fact that the EU interest intermediation system is pluralistic.

Taking into account external factors, the political context also influences the representation of interests in energy policy. This is particularly evident during the political changes and the takeover of power by conservative right-wing parties. In many European countries far-right parties tend to show evidence of rejection of climate science, opposition to decarbonization in general, support for gas and coal technologies, and opposition to some types of policy favourable to renewable energy and energy efficiency (Hess & Renner, 2019). So one can assume that:

H3: The takeover of power in Poland by the conservative Law and Justice party and the process of illiberal backsliding and creeping authoritarianism strengthen the influence of state conventional energy corporations in energy policy.

In the studies one uses the method of qualitative analysis of particular policy outcomes, legislation process in chosen cases, relations between main stakeholders (including decision-makers and various interest groups) and traces the influence of internal (domestic, political and economic) and external (the EU policies and regulations) factors. The research is conducted in the perspective of interest group theory and lobbying, as well as the theory of interest intermediation system (corporatism, pluralism, statism).

2. The Poland's energy policy and role of state conventional energy companies

The power system in Poland is created by the National Power System, which includes the power producers subsystem (power plants and combined heat and power plants), transmission grid and distribution network. Polish energy sector is based on fossil fuels, electricity is produced mainly from hard coal and lignite. Currently, 80% of electricity is produced from coal.

After the fall of communism, changes were introduced in the energy sector, although its development is still path-dependent (Jankowska & Ancygier, 2017). Privatization and consolidation of capital groups were followed by partial renationalization. State-owned companies were established and currently 82% of electricity is generated by professional conventional power plants. As a result of the consolidation of the power industry, four large companies of the State Treasury were established: PGE, TAURON, ENEA and ENERGA.

The plan of creating almost an oligopoly of the state energy groups was not accidental. It was assumed that large groups would have the economic potential needed for large investments. The government expects companies to build new power plants, which

will ensure the country's energy security and at the same time support the failing mines. The Polish energy sector in the EU is distinguished by the fact that Poland is the largest producer and consumer of hard coal, has the largest centralized heating system, and is a transit country for oil and natural gas between the Russian Federation and Germany.

Although the Polish energy policy has been subject to a process of both horizontal and vertical Europeanisation since 2000 (Jankowska & Ancygier, 2017), it is reactive in nature. The strategy papers prepared by governments are only a response to the requirements of the EU. There is no single coherent and far-reaching strategy for the development of the energy sector, which results in a high level of uncertainty in planning and no possibility to predict its development. Although ideas to diversify energy sources (e.g., shale gas, a nuclear power plant) have emerged over the last three decades, coal is still the primary and dominant source of electricity generation. The reluctance of the government and energy producers to transform the energy sector means that Poland will not meet its obligations towards the EU set for 2030, will not meet its national targets concerning the share of RES in energy production (the 15% target), the level of energy efficiency, and emission reductions in non-ETS sectors. This is not so much a result of negligence of the state policy, but rather an effect of the interests of privileged groups in this sector, i.e., conventional energy companies. The long-term consequence will be the serious difficulties in achieving the EU climate policy goals set for 2030 and 2050, which will multiply the costs of the energy transformation in the country or even hamper it (Bukowski, 2019). The problem concerns the power sector, where in a result of pressure and offensive lobbying of energy concerns and the coal sector, the government blocked the development of onshore wind energy.

At the end of 2019, the European Commission presented a new European Green Deal strategy, which assumes that the Union will achieve climate neutrality by 2050 through decarbonization and energy transformation. The Polish government has already declared that it will not give up on coal, which is completely contrary to EU policy. Even the latest government proposals presented in the plan of "Energy Policy of Poland 2040" assume a 56% share of coal in the energy mix by 2030. The visible passive attitude of the Polish government towards the reduction of GHG emissions exposes Poland to disproportionately high operating costs in the EU in 2030 and 2040.

At present, as a result of the process of concentration in the power industry, three largest producers (which were part of the groups: PGE Polska Grupa Energetyczna S.A., ENEA S.A., TAURON Polska Energia S.A.) still had in total almost 2/3 of the installed capacity and were responsible for about 67% of domestic electricity production (National Report of PER, 2021, p. 10). The largest producers of electricity are four state-owned companies:

- PGE – has a 41% market share and manages several dozen power plants and combined heat and power plants (including the largest power plant in Bełchatów).

- Enea – 16 % market share, distributor of energy in western Poland.
- Tauron Polska Energia – 8% market share, owner of 8 power plants and coal-fired cogeneration plants.
- Energa – 2% share in the market.

The distribution network is also dominated by the four largest distribution operators: Enea, Energa, PGE and Tauron. All four companies are members of the Electricity Committee, which is the main consultative partner for the government in energy policy. The main shareholder of the companies is the State Treasury (58% of shares for PGE; 52% of shares for Enea and Energa; 30% of shares for Tauron). However, the vast majority of power plants and combined heat and power plants are characterized by low efficiency and quite high emissivity, many of them have been in operation for over 40 years.

The consolidation of the sector and renationalization have led to less institutionalized forms of links and dependencies between the energy sector, the government and political elites. Initially, conflicts were attempted to be resolved through social dialog and tripartite agreements between government, trade unions and employers. However, over time, formal and non-formalized networks and dependencies began to play an increasingly important role.

In Poland, there is no single coherent interest intermediation system with the characteristics of neocorporatism, however, in some sectors, e.g., in the energy sector, one can distinguish such elements that prove the tradition of neocorporatism. One of the basic features of neocorporatism is the existence of a monopoly on the representation of interests and formalized procedures for their aggregation (Grote & Schmitter 2003, pp. 285-286). In the Polish energy sector, it is the state-owned energy concerns and coal companies as the employers and trade unions from this sector that have a monopoly on interests representation. Only these interest groups are granted with the right to express their views on energy policy in specially appointed committees. Other actors, e.g., environmental organizations are not considered as consultation partners. It is the creation of the "policy monopoly" (Jankowska & Ancygier, 2017).

3. Energy from renewable resources as a threat and an opportunity for state-owned energy companies

Poland has been obliged to regulate the production of energy from renewable sources by Directive 2009/28/EC, which assumes that by 2020 the EU will achieve a 20% share of renewable energy in total energy consumption (15% in Poland). The EU Member States were required to adopt the relevant laws by December 2010. However, Poland has not fulfilled this obligation and the European Commission has requested the government to do so. Under the pressure from conventional energy companies, the government continued to delay the preparation of regulations. After two years, the Commission complained to the EU Court of Justice about the non-implementation of the EU law. After 5 years of struggle with the European Commission, the RES Act was passed in 2015, but the whole process of its adoption, as well as disputes and conflicts related to it, point to the dominant role of the

interests of conventional (coal) energy companies and almost their symbiosis with the interests of the ruling party.

The government did not intend to introduce any changes to the energy policy, especially in the field of RES development. It applied a strategy of delays, stalling and unrealized investments. It planned the development of shale gas power, invested in new coal units, and planned nuclear power plant. Energy from RES was treated as too expensive and uncertain. The government forced by the EU to promote RES has introduced a system of green certificates in line with the interests of coal power companies, which supported the method of co-combustion of coal with other raw materials. It allocated EUR 4 billion for this purpose. The system supported the production of energy from coal, which slowed down the development of renewable energy.

After the long and fierce battle in 2015 in the Parliament (night voting, random amendment, political conflicts) the law was adopted and it was beneficial for the prosumer energy sector. However, the adoption of the act did not end the battle. A few months later, the law was amended and a number of bureaucratic barriers (penalties, controls, limits) were introduced, which make investments in RES installations unprofitable. By 2022, the law has been amended over a dozen times, but always in line with the interests of state energy companies.

The analysis of the process of adopting the RES Act shows that each government (regardless of which party exercises power) primarily pursues the interests of conventional energy companies, treating them as an interest of the state. Both the actions and arguments of the government indicate extremely close relations and dependencies between government and energy companies.

Wind energy has been developing in Poland since 2011 and the costs of wind energy production have been falling. Wind farms became the investment opportunity for domestic and foreign companies, regional governments, small and medium-sized enterprises, and they were slowly becoming competition for conventional (coal) power generation. As a result of pressure from state energy companies, the ruling Law and Justice party decided in 2016 to introduce regulations which completely hindered the development of onshore wind energy. The Act on Wind Energy Investments was passed, which aimed to eliminate onshore wind energy.

However, in 2019, there was a sharp turn in the promotion of wind energy in Poland, as energy concerns realized that the construction of offshore wind farms is an opportunity to produce cheap energy and meet the obligation to increase the share of RES in the energy mix. Under pressure from PGE, among others, the government has prepared a draft law on promoting energy generation in offshore wind farms, which enables companies to invest in wind farms in the Baltic Sea and provides financial support from the state budget. Other companies are also interested in offshore investments: Energa, Enea, Tauron. Although offshore wind power is a much more expensive source of energy than onshore, the government is promoting it. As a result, state-owned companies will still

be able to maintain their monopolistic position on the energy market and prevent the development of alternative prosumer energy.

4. Strategies of representation of conventional energy interests at the EU level – neocorporatism versus elite pluralism

There is a general agreement among researchers that the EU's interests intermediation system has evolved over the last decades and now has many pluralistic features (Streeck & Schmitter, 1991; Eising 2007; Coen & Katsaitis, 2013), and that the relationship between the EU institutions and interest groups is subject to advanced institutionalisation (Mazey & Richardson, 2015; Richardson & Coen, 2009; Kurczewska, 2011). Schmitter and Streeck (1991) pointed to the process of transition from "national corporatism" to "transnational pluralism". They point out that, in this case, pluralism means that "the system is fragmented, less hierarchically integrated and more internally competitive" (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999, p.136).

Moreover, the structure and functioning of the EU institutions promotes and stimulates pluralistic patterns of interest aggregation. R. Eising (2007), when examining European business organizations, concluded that the emerging EU interest intermediation system is an elite pluralism. D. Coen, S. Mazey and J. Richardson also argue that the system should be described as pluralistic or elite (or chameleon) pluralistic (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013; Mazey & Richardson, 2015).

Representation of interests before EU institutions requires adaptation of national strategies to the specific requirements of the European interests intermediation system. Studies (Kohler-Koch *et al.*, 2013) show that there are different models for adapting national strategies to the requirements of the European lobbying arena. For interest groups from new member states of the EU this is a challenge because they need to adapt their "national logic of influence" to the new, as yet unrecognized conditions in the European arena. Poland lacks a tradition of pluralism in interest representation, so Polish stakeholders may encounter difficulties in effective advocacy at the EU level. There may be a clash of national traditions of neocorporatism with the pluralistic (or elite pluralistic) interests intermediation system of the EU. Thus, the question arises as to how the privileged state-owned conventional energy companies in Poland represent their interests before the EU institutions. The analysis of the lobbying strategy of Polish conventional energy companies on the EU climate and energy package, the EU winter package and other regulations show the complexity of this problem and the dominant role of the "big four" in creating Poland's position in the EU negotiations.

5. Lobbying of Polish energy companies regarding the EU's energy and climate policy

The propositions of new regulations within the EU's energy-climate package were a serious challenge for Poland, particularly on the EU Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading System (EU-ETS). Polish energy sector is dependent on coal, which is why the government had to take its specificity into account. The most controversial were the plans to introduce as of 2013 auction trade of CO² emission permits. The largest energy

companies in Poland undertook intensive lobbying to oblige the government to consider their interests in the Poland's position in the EU-level negotiations. The Green Effort Group (G6) was established in order to advocate their interests. This organisation was founded by four energy companies: PGE, Tauron, Enea and Energa and played a key role in determining the position of Poland at the EU level. Close relations between the Group G6 and the Poland's government during negotiations on the EU's energy-climate package indicate the neocorporatist character of energy policy in Poland. Despite the lack of formal institutionalisation, Group G6 participated in determining the position of Poland in the Council and in the European Parliament. The interests of coal energy companies were regarded to constitute strategic interests of Poland. The EU's energy-climate package was perceived as a serious threat to the Polish economy and society, since its implementation will hinder the development of the energy sector, and shall result in increase of energy prices. Even the public debate in Poland was dominated by a catastrophic vision of the results of implementation of the package. Some neocorporatist traditions in Poland as well as the unusually privileged position of the energy sector determined the aims and shape of Poland's position concerning the EU climate policy.

Poland was the main opponent of the introduction of full payment as of 2013 and became the leader of a group of nine less developed EU Member States (including Czech, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania), which demanded the introduction of transitory periods for their economies. The Council took into account the demands of Poland not wanting to risk the entire package to be vetoed and agreed to a compromise. In the end, the provisions of the EU's energy-climate package were made less severe (Kurczewska, 2011). The example of the influence of state energy companies during the negotiations of the EU's climate and energy package is no exception. Also on other issues related to the EU energy and climate policy, companies together with the government conducted intensive lobbying towards EU institutions to defend the interests of coal-fired energy.

In 2018, in line with the expectations of coal energy sector, a power market was introduced in Poland, whose mechanisms provided energy companies with a stable future and EUR 1 billion in support. At the same time, the EU adopted the "Clean energy for all Europeans" package (winter package), which limited the possibility of using the power market by sources emitting more than 550 kg of CO₂ per MWh of energy. This means that the coal power industry in Poland will not be able to benefit from the power market. The package assumes decarbonisation of the energy sector in the Union, which has provoked strong opposition from the Polish government and conventional energy companies. In December 2018, during the negotiations in the Council on the Winter Package, the Polish Minister fought for the interests of the coal-fired power industry and tried to "dismantle the unagreed elements of the Package" (Wiśniewski, 2018, p.1.). Eventually, a solution beneficial to energy concerns was won and Poland will be able to use the mechanism of the power market for coal-fired power units which won the auctions until 2019, regardless of the stage of implementation (the so-called grandfathering clause). The minister managed to "defend Polish coal in Brussels", which was treated as a defence of national interest.

In many other matters concerning energy and climate in the EU, the government, but also Polish MPs in the European Parliament, represented only interests of conventional energy, ignoring the expectations of other stakeholders (ecological, regional, consumers). Comparative surveys of CEE countries show that Poland was the biggest opponent and the most vetoed country during voting in the Council on matters concerning EU climate and energy policy (Ćetković & Buzogány, 2019). Defending the interests of the conventional energy sector, the Polish government during 17 votes in the Council in the period 2013-2018 voted 10 times against the EU regulations, including the following: GHG emissions (7 times veto), Air pollution (2 times) and Renewable Energy (1 time) (Ćetković & Buzogány, 2019, p.130). In the GHG emissions reduction and ETS reform cases, Poland was alone and did not manage to block the voting in the Council. It tried to form coalitions with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, but failed to form a blocking minority (Ćetković & Buzogány, 2019, p. 130).

Taking into account the analysis of the lobbying on the climate and energy package and winter package, it can be concluded that the strategies for interests representing of conventional (coal) energy companies at the EU level are based on close cooperation with the government. The ambitious objectives of the EU climate policy are seen as a threat, hence the increased activity to mitigate, change or delay them. National patterns of neocorporatism in the interests representation in the Polish energy sector are of little use in the European pluralist lobbying arena. The EU's interests intermediation system is dominated by competition and rivalry between stakeholders, there are no privileged groups. Therefore, Polish energy companies choose the "national route", seeing the government as the main advocate and spokesperson of their interests at the EU level. As it turns out, this strategy has been effective so far, as the interests of this sector have been recognized as Poland's interest, which entitles the government to fiercely defend them during negotiations in the Council.

6. Representation of interests in energy policy in the times of illiberal backlash and creeping authoritarianism in Poland

With the takeover of power in Poland in 2015 by the conservative Law and Justice party (PiS), a progressive process of democratic and illiberal backsliding and creeping authoritarianism in various fields is visible, which is manifested in undermining the universality of democracy and in 'erosion of liberal-democratic norms, replacing them with new counter norms that emphasize state security, civilizational diversity, and traditional values' (Fomina & Kucharczyk. 2016, p. 58), as well as in the pursuit of the authorities to win control over strategic political and economic resources (Scheiring, 2018).

The energy policy clearly shows an increase in the ruling party's control over the energy sector development and often "manual control". In many cases it is the Law and Justice leaders, not the prime minister or minister, who decide on specific energy issues. State-owned energy companies are subject to total control through individual political decisions of the ruling party regarding investments (e.g., the decision to build a 1,000 MW coal-fired power unit in the Ostrołęka power plant, whose economic viability is being

questioned by all experts), as well as through extremely frequent changes of their presidents and management boards. The energy market is also controlled, energy prices are regulated by the Energy Regulatory Office, but in 2018 the government made a political decision to "freeze" them for individual consumers. The top-down interventions of the ruling party in the energy policy, such as: inhibiting the development of onshore wind and prosumer power, favouring coal power, enabling the development of offshore power, but only for state energy concerns, testify to the centralization and concentration of power. Since 2017, the energy sector is being renationalized. The government has 'clawed back control of many foreign-owned power and heating assets to ensure the country's energy security. The biggest deals include PGE buying power and heating assets from France's EDF and Enea' (Reuters 2018, p.1.). This is accompanied by a narrative highlighting economic patriotism and the need to ensure energy security for Poland.

The process of institutionalization of dependence and links between state energy companies and ruling political parties has been visible since the 1990s, but it has been advancing since 2015 when the Law and Justice gained power. As an example, the power industry took over the collapsing mines, e.g., in 2016 energy companies took over a 51% controlling stake in the Polish Mining Group, among others, Energa, PGE and Enea, paying PLN 300-500 million each. Institutionalization concerns not only formalized legal and ownership dependencies, but also informal links between senior officials of relevant ministries, boards and supervisory boards of companies, politicians from the ruling party responsible for a given sector in parliamentary committees and local party leaders (Ruszkowski 2018, p. 28). Quite often, a "revolving door" mechanism is visible, i.e., politicians go to business and back, and a "carousel of positions", which makes the company's management almost entirely dependent on the politicians appointing them, e.g., in Energa in the period 2015-2022 the president was changed 11 times, while in the remaining three energy companies 5-10 times.

Centralization of power and top-down control in energy policy can be understood 'not so much as populism, but as a combination of economic nationalism – subordinating the economy to national interests and to the imperative of protecting national identity – and conservatism, reorienting economic policies to serve the traditional family and undo the perceived wrongdoings of post-communist elites, in particular, privatization' (Blum & Varga, 2019, p. 2). K. Blum and M. Varga call this core conservative developmental statism.

Not only in Poland, but also in other CEE countries (e.g., Hungary) there is a trend of increasing statism in the energy sectors associated with the illiberal turn, which is motivated by the protection of domestic energy companies and provision of cheaper energy (Ćetković & Buzogány, 2019). Striving to protect the national energy model and centralization of decisions also translate into Poland's position in the EU institutions. The position of the Law and Justice party government protecting coal-based energy is completely contrary to the priorities of the EU's climate policy, which causes Poland to become increasingly isolated and lonely in the European arena. At the European Council in December 2019, Poland

declared that it would not support climate neutrality by 2050, which was in line with the interests of coal energy companies, mines and mining trade unions.

Conclusions and policy implications

The main aim of the article was to analyse the role and influence of interest groups in Poland's energy policy in the context of the EU climate and energy policy. The analysis was aimed at answering the question of who shapes Polish energy policy, which stakeholders have the greatest influence, what system of interest intermediation has been formed in the energy sector, whether the interests of these groups are consistent with EU climate policy priorities and whether they favour the energy transformation. The research carried out allows for several conclusions to be drawn.

First of all, the analysis shows that state-owned conventional (coal) energy companies have privileged access to the law-making process in Polish energy policy. The most important legal regulations concerning energy policy in Poland take into account their expectations and interests. It can therefore be assumed that they are the result of close cooperation between energy companies and the government. This is facilitated not only by the ownership structure of these companies, but also by the network of political and economic dependencies that have been formed for many decades.

The analysis of several cases important for the energy sector: the Act on the Promotion of RES, the Distance Act or the draft Act on Offshore Wind Energy indicate a dominant role of the interests of coal energy concerns. Regardless of which political party exercises power, the coal power industry enjoys special considerations and their demands are taken into account in legal regulations. The monopoly of state concerns on the representation of interests in the energy sector and their extremely privileged position indicate neocorporatist traditions, which confirms the hypothesis (H1) put forward in the research. Due to the dominant role of the state in this policy, it may be assumed that this neocorporatist model also contains features of statism or state-corporatism.

However, the consolidation and renationalization of the sector leading to the centralization of power and the creation of a 'policy monopoly' (Jankowska & Ancygier, 2017) lead to the formation of a network of dependencies and links between corporations and the government and political elites. Sometimes these take on the character of a pathology of power (e.g., "revolving door", "carousel of positions") as well as an oligopoly in the energy sector. Privileging the interests of the coal sector in the energy policy leads to a halt in the development of RES or prosumer energy, and thus blocks the energy transition in Poland.

Secondly, the interests of the Polish energy sector are also represented at the EU level. Although the EU's interests intermediation system is pluralistic in nature, energy companies continue to use national patterns of neocorporatism, following the "national route" and working closely with the government. The interests of conventional energy companies have been considered to be the same as the "Polish reason of the State", so the government defends the coal-fired power industry by vetoing decisions most often during

negotiations in the Council. The analysis of two cases of the EU climate and energy package and winter package not only confirms the hypothesis of a neocorporatist pattern of interests representation of Polish concerns at the EU level (H2), but also indicates the effectiveness of this strategy. In several cases the strategy of delaying, "diluting" and blocking the energy transformation has been successful. However, there is a problem with the Europeanization of Polish energy policy and interest representation. Due to different interests (defence of coal), Polish corporations encounter difficulties in establishing networks of cooperation with other stakeholders in Brussels, so the process of Europeanization of their advocacy strategy is not advanced. The European Green Deal assuming the creation of a zero-emission economy is a challenge for the Polish energy sector, but energy concerns are not afraid of the development of RES. Their aim is to maintain their monopolistic position and privileges in the sector, even if they will be forced to produce energy from RES.

Thirdly, the process of illiberal backlash and creeping authoritarianism in Poland is manifested in the energy policy in greater centralization of power and control of the sector, renationalization of energy companies and "manual control". The boundaries between the economy and politics are increasingly blurred. The examples given above, often of a political rather than an economic nature (e.g., the decision to expand the Ostrołęka power plant, to take over unprofitable mines, to "freeze" energy prices) show the mechanisms of intervention by the political elite and the ruling party, which makes it possible to verify the last hypothesis (H3). The strategy of power consolidation uses a narrative emphasizing economic patriotism and state security. This is accompanied by the exchange of ruling elites in the sector ("revolving door" and "carousel" mechanism).

To sum up, it can be concluded that the Polish energy policy is co-shaped by state-owned coal energy companies. The lack of a single coherent far-reaching energy development strategy in Poland allows for making different decisions and frequent changes of plans. The legal regulations enforced by the EU are not coincidentally consistent with the expectations and interests of conventional energy concerns, creating favourable conditions for them. Strategies of mitigation, delay and blocking the development of renewable energy are an effective method for companies to maintain their monopolistic position in the sector.

It would certainly be interesting to analyze the role of interest groups and lobbying in energy policy in other CEE countries, especially in those where state-owned companies have considerable influence and where the process of illiberal backlash and creeping authoritarianism is observed. Qualitative research of energy policies in several countries, e.g. Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, would allow for a comparative analysis of the role and impact of state-owned enterprises on this policy, their strategies of representing interests and the methods used, it would show the differences and similarities between them, which may be derived from systemic, political and economic conditions.

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