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Encouraging sustainable renewable energy growth in the enlarged EU

In line with the overall strategy of sustainable development the EU decided to promote energy production from domestic renewable sources. In March 2007, the EU member states committed to covering 20% of their overall energy needs from renewable energy sources by 2020.

Among the EU member states, the recent entries from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries are particularly challenged in improving the renewable energy production and consumption. Economically, the conversion would involve considerable investments. Politically, environmental protection is widely considered a second-order priority (following at a distance behind more urgent matters of economic development rather being a base-line condition for development). Also the general public shows little problem awareness. At the same time, however, the energy sector in these countries is even more vulnerable to (a) production shortages and (b) environmental problems due to the heritage from the centrally planned era. Most new CEE countries are highly dependent on imports, while relying on highly energy intensive industrial structures. Especially domestic energy production focuses on non-renewable and environmentally especially problematic resources.

These general patterns appear to group the CEE countries into a more or less coherent cluster. The current research tends to approach this cluster either from the point of view of the West European (or OECD) forerunner countries and scrutinised to what extent 'best practice' here can be applied in Central and Eastern Europe. Alternatively, the CEE countries are analysed from the perspective of 'developing countries'. Both research traditions tend to ignore the special conditions of political and economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the implications of membership in the European Union.

Furthermore, current research tends to assume to easily the existence of the coherent 'CEE cluster'. In fact, we see far more institutional and social differentiation in these countries than widely thought, which may make "Western models" and incentive structures differently applicable in the various countries. It is the aim of this dissertation too, first, to highlight the institutional, social and political factors – besides the technical and economic ones that presently receive most attention – in the dynamics of (new) energy policy in the CEE countries. What are the opportunities and where lie the constraints for introducing renewable energy policies? Second, this research will not only identify the specific Central and Eastern European characteristics, but it will also draw a more differentiated picture of the renewable energy market development based on a comparative analysis of CEE countries.