

A secure and competitive Europe or a green Europe – why not both?

Summary of the Think2030 Dialogue Poland



Europe is at a crossroads. The cost of environmental pollution is rising, and the effects of natural disasters caused by climate change are becoming more severe – Poland is still battling the consequences of last year's flooding. At the same time, there are growing concerns about the escalation of the war in Ukraine. In these uncertain times, how to ensure the security and competitiveness of the European Union without abandoning its environmental and energy transition goals? This was the question posed by the participants of the

Think2030 Dialogue Poland conference, held in Warsaw on March 28.

"Running our current system, largely based on fossil fuels, costs us 270 billion zlotys a year. The investment needed to cut emissions and build resilience is just half of that – 150 billion zlotys annually, with funding already available", stated the **Secretary of State at the Ministry of Climate and Environment, Urszula Zielińska** in her opening remarks. Her words offered a promising start for further discussions among experts and policymakers, more than a hundred of whom came to the conference organized by [the Reform Institute](#) and [the Institute for European Environmental Policy \(IEEP\)](#). Participants in sessions on the Clean Industrial Deal, sustainable agriculture, and the extension of the Emissions Trading System (ETS2) to include transportation and construction exchanged views and presented solutions in an effort to find a common path to a more sustainable, secure and competitive European Union economy.

The discussions highlighted the importance of finding synergies between climate goals and energy security, while strengthening international cooperation, economic stability, and ensuring a just transition that takes into account the interests of all sectors of society.

The path to a sustainable and safe Europe

Participants in the main session emphasized that clean energy is the key to a competitive Europe that is resilient to macroeconomic and political crises. In order to achieve Europe's mid-century climate neutrality and the intermediate climate target for 2040, EU countries should intensify cooperation and gain easier access to European funds.

The change in Europeans' approach to building energy independence was illustrated by **Niels Malskær, Senior Energy Advisor from the Danish Embassy in Poland**, who pointed out that Danes appreciated the value of the Baltic Pipe pipeline after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. *"Denmark will be supporting the 90% 2040 goal during its presidency because clean energy means competitiveness and resilience",* added the representative of Denmark, which will take over the presidency of the Council of the EU after Poland in the second half of 2025.

During the session, it was also pointed out that the transformation should put people at the center of it, so that they are the beneficiaries, and the polluters are the main payers. Panelists stressed the need to

change the approach to avoid the dilemma between climate and defense spending. *"Every złoty invested in the energy transition strengthens our security and safety – today and in the future. Every złoty, every euro spent on climate action is złoty or euro spent on a stronger economy, greater resilience, and better preparedness. If we fully implement the measures outlined in the NECP, we can significantly reduce the costs of dealing with climate-induced disasters. The investments will lower the energy bills – by 20% in 2030 and 30% by 2040, and even more beyond",* argued **Minister Zielińska**. There were also calls for simplifying processes, effective regulation and building European value chains. *"We need twice as much energy at half price we are paying today",* said **Bartek Czaczyński, CEO of Business & Science Poland**.

According to **Jakub Safjański from Confederation Lewiatan**, the green transition supports Poland's long-term development and will positively impact the labor market, generating demand for high-quality jobs. *"The Clean Industrial Deal presents a huge opportunity for the Central and Eastern Europe in terms of clean tech uptake. "CEE has advantages compared to Western Europe – a skilled workforce and low population density. Scaling up clean tech in the CEE will happen if the region works together",* underlined **Suzana Carp, Co-Founder Cleantech for CEE** during a panel on clean and competitive industry in Europe.

ETS2 implementation: challenges and opportunities

One of the main topics discussed at the event was the implementation of the so-called ETS 2, which is planned for 2027. The new ETS will cover buildings, road transport and small industry. However, one of the challenges will be ensuring the effectiveness of the new mechanism while maintaining social justice and protecting the most vulnerable groups.

Recognizing the risks associated with ETS2 implementation, participants emphasised the need to prepare robust Social Climate Plans and complementary national policies on energy and transportation poverty protection, among others. This would enable a smooth transition to carbon-free heating and sustainable mobility, while reducing economic risks. Poland will be the largest beneficiary of the Social Climate Fund created on the basis of the plan, but also the country most affected by the implementation of ETS2 due to the dominance of fossil fuels in heating and transport. *"Climate dividends could be an option, with regional differentiation. You should target not only the lowest income, but the bottom 50-60% of households. It is important to use not only the budget of the Social Climate Fund, but also revenues that the Polish treasury will be getting from ETS system",* advocated **Adam Guibourgé-Czetwertyński, Head of Poland Office at E&T**.

While the panellists agreed that significant deviations from ETS2 are not possible and there will be no SCF without its implementation, there were differences of opinion on the timing. *"Delaying the system will make us better prepared for implementation",* suggested **Paweł Różycki, Deputy Director in the Department of Air Protection and Climate Negotiations at the Ministry of Climate and Environment**. He pointed out that more than one million homes have already been retrofitted since the launch of the flagship "Clean Air" program, which translates into 250,000-300,000 per year. *"We are not on track with buildings renovation, and we really need to get started now. What we want is for ETS2 to push for permanent change",* stated **Julie Kjestrup, President of Efficient Buildings Europe and Vice-Chair of the Energy Efficiency Policies**.

A breakthrough year for European agriculture

The event also featured a discussion on European agriculture, for which this year will be a breakthrough. In the coming months, the 2040 climate target will be agreed upon, which will set the pace for further

transformation of the food-producing sector. Participants discussed how the Polish presidency can ensure that the agriculture sector receives adequate attention in the upcoming negotiations of the Multiannual Financial Framework. This is crucial because agriculture in the EU is responsible for a large share of emissions, and scientific estimates show significant potential for reducing them. *"20-25% of emissions from the Polish farms can be avoided simply by applying good practises"*, informed **DSc Adam Wąs, Professor at Warsaw University of Life Science**.

It is crucial for Polish agriculture to simplify the bureaucracy involved in implementing European regulations and to increase the profitability of production. It is essential to invest in larger farms, which, thanks to economies of scale, will be able to better prepare for the changing demands and challenges of climate disasters. They will allow Polish farms to compete in the global market, while ensuring environmentally sustainable production.

Direction 2050: shared responsibility for Europe's neutrality

The main conclusion for the Polish presidency from the Think2030 conference in Warsaw is the need for comprehensive policies that cover different sectors of the economy and encourage people to accept particular losses to achieve collective gain, leading for a stronger, more integrated and competitive Europe.

"The presidencies are uniquely positioned to deliver such an approach, going beyond separate initiatives and negotiating files. Our conference shows that only through close and strong cooperation between policymakers, experts, businesses and civil society, the transition toward a green, competitive, and fair Europe can remain within reach", summarised **Zofia Wetmańska, Vice-President of the Reform Institute**.

The Think2030 Dialogue Poland conference was an opportunity for an in-depth dialogue between politicians, scientists and experts from NGOs and think tanks on solutions to increase the competitiveness of Poland and the EU, as well as to promote ambitious energy transition measures that support socio-economic development. It was held under the honorary patronage of the Ministry of Climate and Environment and the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

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