

19 April 2024

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Publication date: 01 March 2014

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ISSN: 0964-8496

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The German heating market: The forgotten part of the Energiewende?

German energy policy – the Energiewende – focuses almost entirely on the power sector. This is not only true in the public perception but also for most of the political sector, and when international gas producers look at the German gas market. Statoil, the producer most visibly advocating gas in Germany, devotes conference speech after conference speech to convincing Germany that its power policy is on the wrong track; that gas is not just a necessary supplement to renewable energies but that Germany should push coal out of the power production portfolio and replace it with gas.

German gas companies – the remaining ones – seem increasingly willing to accept that the power sector will most likely remain a tough battle-ground for the foreseeable future. The still rather new German economic and energy minister Sigmar Gabriel told the senior managers of the German energy industry in his inauguration speech at one of the biggest industry meetings, the Handelsblatt Annual Energy Conference (Jahrestagung Energiewirtschaft) : “You can’t quit nuclear and coal at the same time”. The latest Ukrainian-Russian crisis will not convince him that he is wrong.

Therefore, representatives of the German gas industry are concentrating more on the heating market as a sector where there may be potential for growth or at least new business. For example Timm Kehler, the managing director of gas pressure group Zukunft Erdgas, repeatedly calls for “a debate about a 'Wärmewende' (heating turn around)”.

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