

The Wall Street Journal, 26 avril

When the Wind Didn't Blow in Germany

A years-long renewables push leaves the economy hostage to the weather.



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Hanover, Germany, March 31. PHOTO: RONNY HARTMANN/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Full text:

Germany has invested so many hundreds of billions of euros in its green energy transition over the years that no one can tally the precise amount. Yet the share of wind and solar power in the country's energy mix in the first quarter of this year managed to fall—by a lot. There's a lesson for the U.S. here.

Renewable sources made up some 47% of electricity consumption in Europe's largest economy in the first three months of 2024, the energy trade association BDEW reported Thursday. **That's down from 56% in the first three months of 2024.** The drop comes despite Germany's continuing build-out of renewable generation. The country has added 872 wind turbines with a capacity of 4.3 gigawatts since April 2024, yet wind-power output fell 16%. **Ouch.**

You can guess what went wrong. February and March were unusually wind-free, onshore and offshore. A lack of rain meant hydropower underperformed. March was sunnier than usual, which helped to boost solar-electricity output compared to a year earlier. But we're talking about Germany in March. Relatively short daylight hours in a northern latitude meant this boost wasn't enough to offset the decline in wind generation.

These climactic conditions happen regularly enough that the German language has a word for it: **Dunkelflaute, or "dark stillness."** It means renewables alone can't power an advanced industrial economy, as even Berlin is starting to notice.

The new coalition agreement that will form the basis for incoming Chancellor Friedrich Merz's agenda envisions building 20 gigawatts of natural-gas-fired power generation by 2030 to provide stable base power. **But Mr. Merz's left-right coalition commits to continuing a renewable build-out, too. Good luck with all that, since an overreliance on intermittent renewables tends to make it uneconomical to run natural-gas plants as a backup. Expect more subsidies in the future. Nuclear power is absent from the plan.**

Germany is further down the road of renewable power than many other large economies. **Its energy mess is enough to make everyone else realize it's not an example to follow.**
