

Austria's largest electricity provider, Verbund has announced today that it will go fossil fuel free by 2020, speeding up the country's transition beyond coal.

The decision to end the use of fossil fuels, announced today as a part of Verbund's new business strategy, sets a 2020 closure date for the company's last operational coal power station in Mellach, Austria. Only two years ago, Verbund was Austria's biggest producer of electricity from coal. Recently, it has been phasing out coal power, as it became unprofitable.

"This decision is yet another proof that getting out of coal is now a no-brainer. Smart companies are making a swift exit from coal" - Kathrin Gutmann, Coal policy coordinator at Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe said. "The few companies that still want to buy coal assets are taking a huge gamble. Coal has no place in the European energy system, as we need to move away from the use of coal to be in line with the goals of the Paris Agreement adopted last year."

Confirming the bleak outlook for coal players, Peabody Energy, the world's largest privately owned coal producer, crashed into bankruptcy today. In Europe, RWE and E.ON, largest coal utilities on the continent are facing severe problems that have recently lead to a spin-off of E.ON's loss-making coal business.

Johannes Wahlmüller, Climate campaigner at Global 2000, Austrian environmental organization, said "Today's announcement crowns years of hard work to convince Verbund to quit coal. Coal used to have an important role in Austria's energy system, but now the country is well on track to ditch this most polluting fossil fuel. It can speed up the transition beyond coal and close all of its last coal power stations by 2020."

Today's announcement means that after 2020 Austria will have only one operating coal power station in Durnrohr. The company who operates it pledged that the plant will go offline in 2025. Environmental NGOs in the country urge a more ambitious phase-out date. They claim the plant could be switched off much earlier, as there are alternatives in place. Currently, there are seven coal-free countries in the EU: Belgium, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and the Baltic states. Moreover, the UK aims for a 2025 coal power end date, Finland plans to phase out coal in the 2020s, and Portugal looks to becoming coal free prior to 2025.
source: caneurope.org