Coal is in sharp decline across Europe, including the UK, Western Balkans and Turkey. Over the last five years, Europe has seen 50% of its coal-fired power plants close or commit to closing. Since 2016, coal power generation has declined by just over half.

French power utility EDF announced the 162nd plant will close in 2022 and now the half of Europe's 324 coal-fuelled power plants have either closed or announced a retirement date before 2030. EDF's planned closure of the West Burton coal-fuelled power plant in the north of England – one of two remaining in Britain – means half of Europe's coal plants will have closed by 2030.

"We are in the endgame for the coal industry in Europe," said Kathrin Gutmann, campaign director at Europe Beyond Coal, an alliance of civil society groups campaigning to phase-out coal.

Phasing out the use of coal is key to tackling climate change. Last week Mike Bloomberg, the UN's special envoy for climate ambition and solutions, wrote an opinion piece for CNN with EU climate chief Frans Timmermans calling to end coal subsidies world-wide.

"If we want to tackle climate change and ensure people's health and well-being, we have to accelerate our move away from coal. Ending our dependence on coal will save lives," they wrote.

Burning coal has become increasingly expensive, partly thanks to the emissions trading scheme (ETS), which has seen the price of emitting CO_2 from EU power plants increase from €5 per tonne of CO_2 to almost €40/t since 2016.

EU financial institutions have also introduced nearly 40 coal-restricting policies in 2020 alone and many commercial banks have announced plans to terminate project finance for new coal projects across the world. In 2015, the UK was the first country to announce its ambition to be coal-free, aiming to reach that target by 2025. France followed the next year, aiming for 2023. Belgium became the first EU country to phase out coal in 2016.

Renewables have also seen an increase in recent years, overtaking fossil fuels for the first time ever this year in electricity production.

But Europe Beyond Coal warns that this uptake needs to increase significantly for Europe to meet its target to cut emissions by at least 55% before the end of the decade. There are still some EU countries that will miss the 2030 deadline for a coal phase-out laid out in the Paris Agreement. Germany is looking at 2038 while Poland, Romania and Bulgaria have no phase-out planned and the Czech Republic and Slovenia are still considering dates.

"Fourteen European countries understand [the economic and political realities] and have washed their hands of coal," said Gutmann.

"The few that remain have a clear choice: plan a 2030 phase out now, with all the benefits of

cheap, clean renewable energy, and EU funds for the transition, or be forced to transition later anyway, but in an unplanned, chaotic way, that is more painful for citizens and workers, damages people's health, and must be paid for out of national budgets," he said.
Source: euractiv.com