

People in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania and Slovenia mostly support climate action, but delays with the adoption of climate policies and the coronavirus crisis are slowing down the implementation of the European Green Deal in some of these countries, according to a study by the ECFR conducted in January and February 2021 and published last week.

European Union (EU) member states in the Southeast Europe (SEE) are generally supportive of the European Green Deal, with Greece and Romania leading the region in terms of climate action, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) said.

Public support for climate action is growing in Bulgaria and the government is shifting its once-hesitant position on the European Green Deal with pledges to increase Bulgarian regions' use of natural gas and plans for the construction of new nuclear and renewable energy facilities, according to the study.

However, politicians have put off discussions about the modernisation of the coal industry although coal-fired generation of electricity and heat currently accounts for more than 90% of the Bulgarian energy industry's greenhouse-gas emissions.

Opposition to low-carbon industrial transformation generally comes from the fossil fuel and mining sectors, as well as trade unions concerned about job losses. Furthermore, Bulgaria is dependent on Russia for almost all its gas imports and most of its oil imports, which is heightening Bulgaria's uncertainty about the European Green Deal.

"Bulgaria's companies, media outlets, and the government generally view climate as just another area in which the EU is interfering," the ECFR said.

The EU's climate efforts have had a positive reception from Croatia's government, citizens, and media outlets and the government is supportive of the European Green Deal, but the impact of the coronavirus crisis has marginalised the issue.

The country has supported the development of strategic energy projects and companies, largely in the gas sector and diversification of energy supply has been a security priority for the Croatian government in recent years.

However, Croatia's adoption and implementation of key climate-related policies have faced repeated delays and discrepancies between the plans of government departments point to deficits in institutional capacity and political will in Croatia's public administration, the study showed.

Greece is supportive of the European Green Deal and views efforts to increase its use of renewable energy sources as an important objective, and the role of the EU as crucial in this regard. Moreover, the country is raising its ambition on climate, aiming to position itself as an international leader on the issue, the ECFR noted.

Measures to decarbonise the country sometimes spark debate about the socio-economic

consequences of the green transition, but Athens hopes the transition will attract foreign investments and EU funds as it sees the European Green Deal mostly from an economic perspective.

In Romania, citizens are generally aware of the climate challenge, and the government sees the European Green Deal as an opportunity to develop a more environmentally friendly economy. Although the government sees the EU as playing an important and positive role in the issue, some political parties refer to “EU rules” for closing coal power plants in areas where people’s livelihoods depend on them, according to the study.

Romania’s government views the expansion of nuclear power and of natural-gas exploitation in the Black Sea as opportunities to improve its energy security and become a relevant actor at the regional level while minimising local risk factors.

Slovenia’s climate ambitions have decreased since January 2020, when a centre-right government replaced its centre-left predecessor. The new government generally does not regard the European Green Deal as an opportunity for economic recovery, but the country has been working to align its strategy with EU plans to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, according to the study.

Slovenians endorse the EU’s climate goals, albeit slightly less than other EU citizens on average. They are wary of the prospect of rising prices for electricity and slow progress on the decarbonisation of transport, which accounts for half of Slovenia’s greenhouse-gas emissions.

“Slovenia could assume a leadership role in the Western Balkans by firmly embedding the European Green Deal in the EU’s neighbourhood and enlargement policies. This is because the country will become the president of the EU Council in the second half of 2021, and has long expressed interest in renewing the momentum of the accession process in the region,” the ECFR said.

Source: renewablesnow.com