



Contraditório think-tank

Briefing

The Post-Fukushima Japanese Energy Policy | Rui Faro Saraiva

After the triple catastrophe of the 11th of March 2011, there is an emerging idea of the need for a profound change in the Japanese energy policy. The debate on the energy issue is extended to the entire Japanese society. The political elite, scholars and civil society are divided between the maintenance, reduction or elimination of nuclear energy in Japan. But the resigning Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, announced in July that Japan should focus on gradually eliminating the dependence on nuclear energy.

The outlook of a new energy policy in Japan is assumed to be sustainable, relying more on renewable energies and recognizing that a system focused on nuclear power is too costly and dangerous, especially in a country exposed to natural events such as earthquakes. While a more sustainable energy policy constitutes a good opportunity to other countries to share their know-how with Japan (e.g. Portugal's renewable energy transition

was a remarkable success), it can also reduce the country's dependence on other forms of energy. In 2008, Japan imported almost 99% of its oil, 98% of its coal, and 96% of its gas. Most of the oil comes from the Middle East, particularly the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, and Kuwait. For coal, Japan relies on Australia, China, Indonesia, Russia, the U.S., South Africa, and Canada. Almost all of the domestic gas is imported, primarily from Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, Qatar, Brunei and the UAE (Harner, 2011).

The ruling Democratic Party of Japan and the opposition Liberal Democratic Party have agreed that the Lower House of the Diet will pass a renewable energy bill that will allow industries that consume large amounts of power to get considerable reductions on their electricity bills. According to a revised draft of the bill, special measures on renewable energy will force power companies to buy all



electricity generated by solar and wind power stations (Nakagawa, 2011).

If Japan's nuclear phase-out is to be achieved, only a long-term plan seems to be viable. In this regard Germany plans to phase-out nuclear energy on 2022. The German decision should be viewed in the context of an energy transition that began two decades ago. Germany started to encourage renewable electricity generation in 1991, which resulted into the Renewable Energy Act in 2000. The initial decision to phase out nuclear power was taken also in 2000 by the then Social Democrat/Green Party governing coalition. The decision of gradually phase-out nuclear energy in Germany came along with a new energy plan that accelerates a phase-*in* of renewable energy and energy efficiency (Morgan, 2011). Japan should take into account the German example. A nuclear phase-out and a sustainable renewable energy plan should come together to achieve energy efficiency and satisfy the country's energy needs.

Still with the nuclear phase-out decision, Japan can assume international leadership on a global trend that drives countries into renewable energies. Close to 80 percent of the world's energy supply could be met by

renewables by mid-century if backed by the right enabling public policies. A new report shown by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), also indicate that the rising penetration of renewable energies could lead to cumulative greenhouse gas savings equivalent to 220 to 560 Gigatonnes of carbon dioxide (GtCO₂eq) between 2010 and 2050 (Eickemeier, 2011). The rising of a Green Japanese Energy Policy can also serve as a soft power tool in international *fora*, enhancing the country's diplomatic capabilities in bilateral or multilateral negotiations.

But a nuclear phase-out in Japan has also its Defense and Security implications. Some of Japan's nationalist and conservative policymakers have dreamed of converting the nation's civilian nuclear and space satellite programs into a military missile capability, deterring China and North Korea. This option was completely swept away after the 11th of March tragic events. Today (15th of August) Japan is commemorating the end of WWII in Hiroshima and other parts of the country. It is important to remind that Japan is still the only country in the world that experienced dramatically the effects of a nuclear attack. The option of nuclear armament of Japan could therefore shatter the country's image as



a civilian power and ruin the legitimacy of its foreign policy.

A more articulated decision-making process inside Japanese governmental institutions could also be one of the outcomes of the energy debate in Japan. The Japanese government is now seeking to incorporate a step that would allow the Energy and Environment Council of its cabinet to implement checks on future deliberations conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

The Post-Fukushima period in Japan will inevitably result in a reformulation of the Japanese energy policy taking into account today's global, regional and national challenges. The cooperation between Japan and some European partners could enhance the transition into a more effective and secure energy policy. Japan has also a chance to serve as an example and assume the leadership in this age of global warming and climate change. Japan's resilience in facing with difficulties and obstacles will not only be a lesson for other nations, but may also shape the trends of energy policymaking across the globe.

References:

EICKEMEIER, Patrick, *Potential of Renewable Energy Outlined in Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, [Online] Available at: <http://cms.srren.ipcc-wg3.de/press/content/potential-of-renewable-energy-outlined-report-by-the-intergovernmental-panel-on-climate-change> [Accessed 12 August 2011]

HARNER, Stephen, *Japan's Energy Dependence*, [Online] Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stephenharner/2011/06/17/japans-energy-dependence> [Accessed 10 August 2011]

MORGAN, Jennifer, *In Germany's Nuclear Phase-Out, Renewable Energy Plans Are Clear*, [online] Available at: <http://www.wri.org/stories/2011/06/germanys-nuclear-phase-out-renewable-energy-plans-are-clear> [Accessed 12 August 2011]

NAKAGAWA, Torue, KOGURE, Tetsuo, *Big industry to get 80-percent discount on renewable energy premiums*, [online] Available at: <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201108130274.html> [Accessed 14 August 2011].



TABUCHI, Hiroko, *Japan Premier Wants Shift Away From Nuclear Power*, [Online] Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/world/asia/14japan.html> [Accessed 10 August 2011].

Rui Faro Saraiva, Researcher at Contraditório think-tank