

Poland ordered to pay \$580,000 fine for each day it continues operating a controversial coal mine

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Poland's coal dependency hampers climate change efforts 03:39

(CNN) Poland will have to pay a €500,000 (\$586,000) fine for each day it continues extracting coal at an open-pit mine near the Czech and German borders, Europe's top court ruled Monday.

The [European Commission](#) ordered Poland to stop operations at the [Turów lignite mine](#) in May following a lawsuit launched by the Czech Republic. Poland has so far failed to comply with the order and the Polish government said in a statement Monday it would continue to do so -- even though the European Court of Justice ruling means it will have to pay the daily penalty.

"The Polish government will not close the KWB Turów mine. From the very beginning, we were of the opinion that the suspension of the works of the mine in Turów would threaten the stability of the Polish power system," Polish government spokesperson Piotr Mueller said in a statement.

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Not a single G20 country is in line with the Paris Agreement on climate, analysis shows

Turów supplies power to around 2.3 million Polish households, according to PGE, the state-controlled company that runs the mine. It is also an important local employer, with one in every two jobs in the region directly or indirectly dependent on it.

- But it has long been at a center of an international dispute. The Turów mine is located in a tiny, appendix-like tip of Poland, right at the border with Germany and the Czech Republic. The two countries have been campaigning to have the mine shut over environmental concerns -- even though they also use coal for power.

According to the International Energy Agency, 80% of Poland's domestic energy came from coal in 2019, compared to 54% in the Czech Republic and 43% in Germany.



The Turów lignite mine in southwestern Poland in 2020.

The conflict escalated when PGE made it clear it was planning to expand the digging closer towards the Czech border, a plan that has caused tension between the two longtime allies. Negotiations on the issue have failed, with Poland refusing to change the plans.

The Czech government has praised the court's decision on Monday. Foreign Minister Jakub Kulhanek said on Twitter he welcomed the judgment and added his country was ready to negotiate with Poland on the future of the mine -- although he stressed environmental issues would be a priority..

Residents on the Czech border are worried about the mine's impact on ground water levels, dust and noise.

"The wells are drying out. As the mine becomes deeper and inches closer to the border, more ground water flows away. There are people who -- in the 21st century -- are now left without water," Milan Starec, one of the residents on the Czech side, [told CNN last year](#).



This legislation is an attack on the free press in Poland PGE and the Polish government say the planned mining area is within the boundaries stipulated in the original 1994 permit. PGE says its studies have shown a minimal impact on ground water levels. To prevent drainage, the company is also building an underground barrier on the site.

- The climate implications of the mine are also significant. Lignite, sometimes called brown coal due to its color, is the least efficient and most polluting type of coal. It has lower fuel value and higher emissions intensity compared to the geologically older hard coal that is mined underground.

The European Union has said it wants to [phase out coal by 2030](#) -- something Poland said it won't be able to do, sparking yet another disagreement with the bloc.

CNN's Antonia Mortensen contributed to this report.