

# Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska

Challenges from  
the civil society  
perspective  
– analysis and  
recommendations





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The main fields of our activity include development of community energy, energy transition and just transition of coal mining regions, the fight against energy poverty as well as improvement of energy efficiency and air quality, and protection of water resources and biodiversity.

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## Summary

Lignite is the most exploited natural resource in Eastern Wielkopolska. It is mined in the Konin Coal Basin which comprises the Konin and Adamów mines and the Zespół Elektrowni Pątnów-Adamów-Konin SA (ZE PAK) power station complex. From the mid-1950s, the subregion's socio-economic development depended on the mining industry and the power industry. Thanks to those two sectors, Konin – the subregion's capital – became a thriving industrial centre. However, this situation began to change in the 1990s when the power industry was restructured, and the city started to decline after losing its status as a regional capital city following Poland's administrative reform. Since the end of the 1980s, the number of workers employed in power stations and in the mining sector has declined significantly. **The region's lignite fields are rapidly becoming depleted, and the local community is opposed to the plans to open new opencast mines such as Ościstowo and Dęby Szlacheckie.** Coal mining is currently expected to end in 2030. The Ościstowo opencast mine, even if it is opened, will not protect the region from the urgent need to phase out coal.

The main challenges faced by the region include:

- ▶ low profitability of continued lignite mining and of retrofitting the coal-fired power stations,
- ▶ large unemployment rate compared with the rest of the region,
- ▶ excessive dependence of the local job market on the mines and power stations controlled by ZE PAK,
- ▶ outflow of young people from the region and an ageing population,
- ▶ environmental degradation and losses suffered by local communities as a result of increased drainage caused by the mines' expanding depression cones,
- ▶ social and legal conflicts over the plans to expand the existing opencast mines and to open new ones, resulting from the absence of dialogue between the mines' management bodies and local communities, among other factors.

Despite a major decline in the region's economic importance and the serious consequences of this decline for the region's population, **no comprehensive plan of a transition that would make the local economy less dependent on coal has been devised so far.** The consequences of this negligence are affecting the local population which urgently needs to find alternative solutions in various fields of economic develop-

ment. The region's worsening hydrological situation is of particular concern. **Opencast mines are having a negative impact on agriculture, causing a significant reduction in yields due to the loss of groundwater and frequently even leading farmers to abandon their agricultural activity.** They also cause the water level in lakes across the region to subside as a result of the formation of the mines' depression cones and contribute to a deterioration of the region's natural beauty. In addition, power stations and opencast mines are the source of air pollution, including mercury pollution, and major carbon dioxide emitters.

**A group of city activists from Konin, mostly associated with non-governmental organisations, have been the first people to raise the issue of Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition in 2017.** This was when the first scenario for the region's development based on renewable energy sources and energy sector innovations was put forward. The civil society has also been the first to become involved in the work of the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, which the region's authorities officially joined in 2019. This led to the appointment of the Regional Government's Plenipotentiary for Eastern Wielkopolska's Restructuring at the Regional Development Agency (ARR) in Konin. **One of the Agency's main achievements so far involved the signing, on 3 April 2019, of the "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition".** The Agreement was signed by more than 40 entities from the region representing the local and regional government, the private sector and non-governmental organisations. ZE PAK, the owner of the power stations and the opencast mines, is also a signatory.

All the stakeholders involved in the processes named above recognise the region's potential for continued development in the field of green energy, which was first comprehensively articulated in the "Konin Energy Valley" concept devised by the regional government which hopes to build the region's future on hydrogen technologies and other renewable energy sources. However, individual groups of stakeholders have divergent interests and expectations as regards the transition process. From the point of view of the regional government, one important challenge involves the vagueness of the term 'just transition' and its many interpretations, which make understanding increasingly difficult, as well as the long-term nature of this process and the absence of guarantees of central gov-

ernment's support on issues such as old age pensions for miners. The civil society would like to make sure that a sufficiently broad public participation in decision-making processes is ensured, and takes the view that these processes should involve the region's rural communities alongside its urban and mining communities. According to the civil society representatives, funds earmarked for the transition processes should be spent primarily on improving the state of the environment, including an improvement of the water situation in the region and reclamation of degraded land, and on human capital investments involving the creation of new jobs, retraining opportunities for mining sector employees and social protection programmes.

In addition, civil society groups argue that funds earmarked for just transition should be available to various groups including the farmers affected by mining, and that support mechanisms for the development of new energy sources should promote the community energy model so that in the future the region's energy generation is not concentrated in the hands of a single company. Finally, ZE PAK, which is the region's largest enterprise, is interested in investing in green energy sources and has applied for funds to finance such investments, but at the same time it still seeks to open a new opencast mine in Ościstowo, which, according to the civil society, will considerably aggravate the region's already serious environmental problems.

## Recommendations

- The most urgent challenge that Eastern Wielkopolska is facing is to devise a transition plan that would take the needs and interests of all sides into account. The plan should contain a schedule, including in particular the deadline for ending coal mining and burning, and should lay down specific goals and methods of achieving them.
- The transition plan should include a long-term strategy for the region and a short-term plan to remedy potential disruptions on the job market. There is an urgent need to work out solutions to protect the local community from negative consequences of these changes as much as possible, for example by offering free of charge retraining opportunities for individuals who lose their jobs.
- It is crucial to agree on a workable formula for further actions by the signatories to the "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition". The Agreement's participants are facing a brand-new task, have no previous experience to rely upon, and that creates a risk that their zest for cooperation may soon die down.
- Inclusiveness of the debate on transition will be of key importance for the transition's success and for its final reception as a just initiative.

## CHALLENGES TO EASTERN WIELKOPOLSKA'S JUST TRANSITION

- ▶ In the opinion of the civil society and experts, over the last 30 years little has been done to make the local economy less dependent on coal.
- ▶ Eastern Wielkopolska's lignite fields are rapidly shrinking and local communities oppose the plans to open new opencast mines.
- ▶ The region has a high unemployment rate compared with the rest of Wielkopolska, large numbers of young people leave the region and its population is rapidly ageing.
- ▶ Opencast mines have a negative impact on local communities and the natural environment, they cause a loss of groundwater, which in turn results in problems in agriculture and subsidence of water level in lakes.
- ▶ Concern expressed by local communities and conclusions from independent expert opinions, which point to the presence of water-related problems in the region, are not taken into account in administrative decisions and the mining company's plans.

Eastern Wielkopolska comprises the following counties: the Konin county and the city of Konin, the Koło county, the Sępólno county and the Turek county. It is also referred to as the Konin subregion as its borders overlap almost completely with the borders of the former Konin voivodship. On the map of Poland, it stands out with its abundance of natural beauty areas such as groups of lakes and adjacent impressive forests, including the famous Lake Gopło situated on the border between Wielkopolska and the Kujawsko-Pomorskie region.

Lignite is the region's most exploited natural resource. Alongside the Turoszów Coal Basin and the Bełchatów

Coal Basin, the Konin Coal Basin is among Poland's three major lignite mining locations.<sup>1</sup> Geographically, the lignite fields are located in the Konin and Turek counties, in the Gniezno lake district and the Kujawy lake district and on the Rychwał and Turek uplands. The Konin Coal Basin includes the Konin and Adamów mines and the Pątnów-Adamów-Konin power station complex (ZE PAK).

From the mid-1950s, the region's socio-economic development depended on the mining industry and the development of the power industry. Thanks to those two factors, Konin – the subregion's capital – became a thriving industrial centre. However, this situation began to change in the 1990s when the power industry was restructured and the city started to decline after losing its status as a regional capital. Despite a major decline in the region's economic importance and serious consequences of this decline for its population, civil society representatives and experts agree that over the last 30 years little has been done to make the local economy less dependent on coal.

This poses a major challenge to the regional government which has decided to launch the region's energy transition and in 2018 announced Eastern Wielkopolska's intention to join the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition (also known as the Coal Platform). On 16 June 2018, at a press meeting with journalists the current head of the Regional Development Agency (ARR) in Konin, then still deputy marshal of Wielkopolska, Maciej Sytek said:

*"We have reached a critical moment in which it suddenly turned out that coal fields are rapidly shrinking, although this has been obvious since the 1990s. No action has been taken, either by the regional government or – especially – the state. The issue of the Ościstowo opencast mine has made everyone aware of the situation we're in. The situation which should inspire the Konin subregion to change in one way or another".<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Poland's fourth largest lignite mining site is the Sieniawa Lignite Mine located in Lubuskie region.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted after: Editors of Turek24, 16.06.2018, <https://turek24.com.pl/maciej-sytek-sniadanie-prasowe-wielkopolska-wschodnia/> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

Strategies for Wielkopolska's development do not go beyond 2020 and this is why the regional government has started work on a new document – the "Strategy for the development of the Wielkopolska region until 2030". The inaugural meeting was held on 23 May 2018 in Poznań and was followed by a series of diagnostic talks during Wielkopolska's Regional Territorial Forum.<sup>3</sup> One of such meetings was held on 24 May in Konin: it launched a debate on the region's nearest future and on ways to abandon the coal monoculture and at the same time avoid major social costs. At present, work is underway on the "Wielkopolska 2030 Strategy" which is expected to be presented for approval to the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly in the fourth quarter of 2019. The whole process is to proceed in line with the principles of partnership, social participation and solidarity, to ensure that the development differences between various parts of Wielkopolska's are taken into account.<sup>4</sup>

## The decline of lignite mining

Eastern Wielkopolska's lignite fields are becoming depleted and local communities oppose the plans to open new opencast mines such as Ościstowo and Dęby Szlacheckie. No environmental decisions have been issued as yet for these two mining projects. The Adamów Lignite Mine has largely been closed – exploitation of the Władysławów field ended in 2012, of the Koźmin field – in 2016,<sup>5</sup> while exploitation of the Adamów field has been extended until 2020 (the initial plan had been to close it in 2018). The Adamów Power Station in Turek was closed in January 2018. One of the reasons behind this was the fact that adjusting the power station's installations to the EU directive which requires operators to reduce the emissions of nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide and toxic particles was found to be too costly. In addition, the power station failed to meet the national standards, which exposed the company's management to financial penalties.

The plans for the Konin Mine are as follows: exploitation of the Józwin IIB field will continue until 2020 (its

annual output is around 5.5 million tons), of the Drzewce field – until 2018–2020 (its annual output is 2.1 million tons), of the Tomistawice field – until around 2030<sup>6</sup> or until around 2025, if the Ościstowo opencast mine is not opened. According to experts from the Institute for Structural Research, exploitation of the Ościstowo field is the only realistic way to increase the availability of coal. The currently expected end-date for coal mining is 2030, however, it is obvious that even if the Ościstowo opencast mine is opened, that will not protect the region from the urgent need to phase out coal. Opencast mining is carried out at increasingly large depths and at an ever longer distance from the Konin Power Station.

In recent years, the cities of Turek and Konin have faced a real threat of interruption in the supply of heating to their residents. Therefore, there is also an urgent need to devise realistic action plans for the coming years to ensure secure operation of the cities' heating systems.<sup>7</sup>

## Socio-economic changes

Since the end of the 1980s, Eastern Wielkopolska has seen a **strong decrease in the number of people employed in power stations and in the mining sector**<sup>8</sup>. Most of those jobs disappeared post-2012, when the ZE PAK SA capital group carried out a privatisation of a group of mines and power stations. Despite the fact that Wielkopolska's unemployment rate has been falling year by year and at present is Poland's lowest (3% in Q1 2019<sup>9</sup>), **Eastern Wielkopolska continues to be home to the region's largest group of unemployed individuals**. At the end of December 2018, the unemployment rate recorded in the Konin county stood at 9%<sup>10</sup> and in the Stupca county – 7.7%.<sup>11</sup> The largest group among the unemployed are people of working age with lower and upper secondary vocational education, primary education and lower secondary education. **Another problem concerns the outflow of people from the region and an ageing population**.<sup>12</sup> According to forecasts, by 2030 the number of

3 Wielkopolska regional government, <https://www.umwww.pl/2030> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

4 Wielkopolska Regional Assembly, *Zasady, tryb i harmonogram opracowania Strategii rozwoju województwa wielkopolskiego do 2030*, <https://www.umwww.pl/attachments/article/57441/Za%C5%82.%201.%20do%20uchwa%C5%82y%20III%2031%2019%20SWW.PDF> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

5 Daniel Kiewra, Aleksander Szpor, *Transformacja Wielkopolski Wschodniej. Ludzie – Gospodarka – Inwestycje*, Institute for Structural Research, 2018, <http://ibs.org.pl/app/uploads/2018/10/3.-Kiewra-Szpor-Wyzwania-spo%C5%82eczno-ekonomiczne-subregionu-koninskiego.pdf> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

6 *Ibidem*.

7 For more see the section "Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition. A case study" by Mitostawa Stępień, PhD

8 Data compiled by the Institute for Structural Research indicates that by 2017 the number of individuals employed at the Adamów Lignite Mine had dropped by 88.6%, and at the Konin Lignite Mine by 86.8%. Daniel Kiewra, Aleksander Szpor, *op. cit.*

9 Statistics Poland, field office in Poznań, <https://poznan.stat.gov.pl/zakladka-1/> (accessed on 31.05.2019).

10 County Employment Centre in Konin, <https://konin.praca.gov.pl/struktura-bezrobocia> (accessed on 31.05.2019).

11 Statistics Poland, field office in Poznań, <https://poznan.stat.gov.pl/opracowania-biezace/opracowania-sygnaalne/praca-wynagrodzenie/bezrobocie-rejestrowane-w-wojewodztwie-wielkopolskim-w-2018-r-6,2.html> (accessed on 31.05.2019).

12 A comparison of data compiled in 2012 and 2017 shows a major decrease in the number of young residents aged 20-30 (from 37.9% to 34.7%) and an increase in the number of older residents which was insignificant in the 30-49 age group and more evident as regards residents aged 50 and older (from 33.6% to 35.5%). BDL GUS quoted after: Daniel Kiewra, Aleksander Szpor, *op. cit.*



Konin's residents will decrease by 16%, which is the highest rate forecast for any county in Wielkopolska.<sup>13</sup>

Eastern Wielkopolska's structure of employment and unemployment indicates that for several decades the region has been dependent on the operation of local mines and power stations. In its present shape, the mining and energy industry continues to offer well-paid jobs and is an important source of income for municipalities. Moreover, ZE PAK, which is Poland's largest privately owned energy group listed on the Warsaw Stock Exchange, is also the region's biggest employer. According to Maciej Sytek, head of the Regional Development Agency in Konin, such a monopolistic structure will sooner or later engender adverse consequences. Today, it is affecting the population of Eastern Wielkopolska which urgently needs to look for alternatives in its economic development in various fields, to attract investors and to encourage its residents to establish their own businesses, all of which should contribute to the region's economic revival. These issues are mentioned in the mission statement and the declaration of objectives of the Regional Development Agency in Konin and in the "Strategy for Konin's development in 2015-2020".<sup>14</sup>

## Environmental degradation

Over the last two decades, the region has seen rising social opposition to the opening of new opencast lignite mines including the Tomistawice opencast mine in the Wierzbinek municipality (which has been in operation since 2010) and other planned mines, i.e. the Ościstowo mine located in the three municipalities of Skulsk, Ślesin and Wilczyn, and the Dęby Szlacheckie mine in the Babiak municipality. Of particular concern is the region's worsening hydrological situation, as documented in numerous expert opinions commissioned in connection with interventions by the respective local communities. **Opencast mines are having a negative impact on agriculture**, causing a significant reduction in yields due to the loss of groundwater and frequently even leading farmers to abandon their agricultural activity. **They also cause the water level in lakes across the region to subside due**

**to the draining effect of the mines' depression cones.** Examples include the lakes in the Powidz Landscape Park in the Gniezno lake district and in the Lake Gopto Millennium Landscape Park, which comprises several Natura 2000 nature protection areas.<sup>15</sup> It has been estimated that **since the beginning of lignite mining in Wielkopolska, 12 billion cubic meters of water has been pumped out from the region, which corresponds to a volume more than 18 times the size of Lake Śniardwy (660 million cubic meters)** and accounts for more than 70% of the total water volume of all Polish lakes (17 billion cubic meters).<sup>16</sup>

Since Poland joined the European Union, Eastern Wielkopolska's mining industry has encountered numerous development obstacles, not only in the form of rapidly shrinking lignite fields and economic analyses pointing to the unprofitability of continued lignite mining, but also in the context of the interests of local communities and environmental protection. Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, and the Framework Water Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council are two examples of environmental legislation whose provisions need to be taken into account in the local economic activity. It is worth noting that the Framework Water Directive secures the rights of European Union citizens to high quality surface water and to the protection of underground water reserves against investments that could damage them, including opencast lignite mines. In practice, in Poland **coal mining has until recently been considered a more important activity than the protection of water resources** and mining companies could easily obtain exemptions from the Directive's requirements.<sup>17</sup> In Eastern Wielkopolska, this has resulted in a crisis and a major water shortage.

The operation of power stations results in the emission of carbon dioxide and other substances to the environment. Citing data compiled by the National Centre for Emissions Management for 2012, in 2014 the *Forbes (Polska)* bi-weekly published a list of Poland's ten largest carbon dioxide emitters – on this list the Pątnów I power station in Konin ranked seventh.<sup>18</sup> In 2013, the currently closed Adamów power station and the Pątnów II power stations ranked third and seventh, respectively, as regards mercury emissions which,

13 Regional Social Policy Centre in Poznań, *Miasto Konin*, <http://rops.poznan.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/miasto-Konin.pdf> [accessed on 20.05.2019].

14 *Strategy for Konin's development in 2015-2020*, 2015, [https://bip.konin.eu/bipredaktor/uchwaly\\_VII/uchwala\\_nr\\_109\\_02\\_1432894999.pdf](https://bip.konin.eu/bipredaktor/uchwaly_VII/uchwala_nr_109_02_1432894999.pdf) [accessed on 20.05.2019].

15 Jan Przybytek, *Aktualne problemy odwadniania złóż węgla brunatnego w Wielkopolsce*, "Górnictwo Odkrywkowe" no. 2/2018, <http://yadda.icm.edu.pl/yadda/element/bwmeta1.element.baztech-d2928352-fa8d-4317-af04-be9e0d7bc148> [accessed on 20.05.2019].

16 Kuba Gogolewski, *ZE PAK czy rzepak. Oddziaływanie społeczne i zdrowotne spółek należących do ZE PAK oraz koszty zewnętrzne planowanych przez ZE PAK kopalni odkrywkowych węgla brunatnego*, "Rozwój TAK - Odkrywki NIE" foundation, Warsaw 2016, p. 19, <https://www.rozwojtak-odkrywkinie.pl/pdf/Raport-ZEPAK-czy-RZEPAK.pdf> [accessed on 20.05.2019].

17 *Fundacja Rozwój TAK - Odkrywki NIE skarży polską politykę wodną do Komisji Europejskiej*, <https://rozwojtak-odkrywkinie.pl/component/k2/item/404-fundacja-rozwoj-tak-odkrywki-nie-skarzy-polska-polityke-wodna-do-komisji-europejskiej> [accessed on 30.05.2019].

18 Magdalena Krukowska, *Najwięksi truciele w Polsce*, *Forbes*, 5.08.2014, <https://www.forbes.pl/csr/najbardziej-emisyjne-elektrownie-w-polsce/z7w4hbx> [accessed on 20.05.2019].

according to experts, generated health-related costs to the tune of EUR 10–23 million and EUR 9–20 million annually, respectively.<sup>19</sup> The Adamów power station ranked nineteenth on the list of Europe's top-thirty coal-fired power stations having the most adverse impact on health.<sup>20</sup>

The economic benefits of electricity generation from the lignite mined by ZE PAK are dubious if one takes into account the health-related costs borne by Poland's population. In 2013, the company's power stations generated external health-related costs worth between EUR 730 million and EUR 1.42 billion in total (the cost of treating lung and circulatory system diseases), which is between 13 and more than 25 times more than the company's net profit for 2013.<sup>21</sup>

Emissions from opencast mines mainly consist of mineral particles, and especially the toxic PM10 particles. In windy weather and in periods of drought, municipalities which host lignite mining activities frequently experience sandstorms whose consequences affect the local residents particularly heavily.

## The civil society's opposition to opencast mines

With the support of national organisations including the "Rozwój TAK - Odkrywki NIE" [YES to Development – NO to Opencast Mines] Coalition, local organisations and civil movements have been **monitoring the legal situation regarding opencast mines and staging large-scale protest actions**. They have also exposed the many years' negligence on the part of the successive mining complex owners, their refusal to take responsibility for the environmental damage and their reluctance to offer compensation.

In 2017, the Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection (RDOŚ) in Poznań refused to issue an environmental decision for the Ościstowo opencast mine and ordered the investor – the ZE PAK company – to present details on how the environmental damage would be compensated for. It also requested the company to prepare a new environmental report for the Tomistawice opencast mine. ZE PAK

appealed against this decision and both cases were referred to the General Directorate for Environmental Protection (GDOŚ). The Ościstowo opencast mine case was returned to the RDOŚ for re-examination and local communities are still awaiting an opinion (as at the end of May 2019).

As regards the Tomistawice case, the GDOŚ upheld the RDOŚ's decision,<sup>22</sup> but the company lodged a complaint about this decision to the Provincial Administrative Court (WSA) in Warsaw. In 2018, this resulted in ZE PAK losing the case because the WSA ruled in favour of Greenpeace, which was a party to the lawsuit, supporting local communities. Greenpeace had argued that there was no point in expanding the mine based on inaccurate forecasts contained in the environmental report compiled back in 2007. The European Commission was of a similar opinion and in 2018 called on Poland to remove EU law infringements and to change the environmental decision regarding the Tomistawice open cast mine. The Commission stated that:

*"[...] the hydrogeological model used several years ago to determine the impact of the opencast mine on surface and underground water was inappropriate and the reach of the depression cone caused by the mine appeared to be greatly underestimated. This means that this investment poses a major risk of significant adverse effects on the Natura 2000 sites such as Lake Gopło and Ostoja Nadgoplańska and as well as the risk of a breach of the Habitats and the Birds Directives".<sup>23</sup>*

It is worth noting that back in 2012 the European Commission had issued a statement on this matter for the first time and the authorities of Poland committed themselves to correct the hydrogeological model.<sup>24</sup> However, they failed to do so, and the Commission reiterated its request in 2018.

**Residents of affected areas situated in the Powidz Landscape Park have been actively involved in the dispute from the very beginning.** In 2008, they lodged a complaint to the European Commission about inaccuracies in the environmental report for the Tomistawice opencast mine which was being planned at that time. Waiting in vain for the Polish government to respond to the 2012 and 2018 calls from the Commission, in November 2018 the Eko-Przebieg association filed a petition to the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions. The petition mentioned

19 CAN Europe, HEAL, WWF European Policy Office, Sandbag, *Europe's Dark Cloud. How coal-burning countries are making their neighbours sick*, Brussels 2016, p. 53, <http://healpolka.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Dark-cloud-report.pdf> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

20 *Ibidem*, p. 34.

21 Łukasz Adamkiewicz, *Opracowanie o wpływie kopalni odkrywkowych i elektrowni należących do Zespołu Elektrowni Pątnów-Adamów-Konin (ZE PAK) na zdrowie, uwzględniające planowane 2 kopalnie odkrywkowe*, Warsaw, July 2016.

22 Press release by the "Rozwój TAK - Odkrywki NIE" foundation of 6.12.2017, [http://odkrywka.info/odkrywka\\_info/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-12-06-GDOS-potwierdza-szkodliwosc-odkrywek.pdf](http://odkrywka.info/odkrywka_info/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017-12-06-GDOS-potwierdza-szkodliwosc-odkrywek.pdf) (accessed on 20.05.2019).

23 Press release by Greenpeace of 29.05.2018, *Wojewódzki Sąd Administracyjny przeciwny dewastacji środowiska przez odkrywkę Tomistawice*, <https://www.greenpeace.org/archive-poland/pl/wydarzenia/polska/Wojewodzki-Sad-Administracyjny-przeciwny-dewastacji-srodowiska-przez-odkrywke-Tomistawice/> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

24 Press release by the European Commission of 14.06.2017, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-17-1577\\_pl.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-17-1577_pl.htm) (accessed on 20.05.2019).

the fact that in January 2018 the mine launched opencast mining activity without a valid permit required under the Water Law. In January 2018 the permit was legally invalid, moreover, in August 2018 it got invalidated by the President of Wody Polskie (the Polish National Water Management Authority). The Committee on Petitions reacted and in May 2019 it replied by stating that the reported problem should be examined by the European Commission and notified to the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.<sup>25</sup> In the meantime, in March 2019 the Director of the Regional Water Management Authority in Bydgoszcz issued a permit required under the Water Law for a "long-term subsidence of underground water level caused by the Tomistawice opencast mine's drainage"<sup>26</sup> and obligated [the mine's operator] to bear the costs of activities intended to maintain the original capacity of drilled wells located within the reach of the mine's operation. The rationale mentioned the not-yet-finished procedure the European Commission had launched against Poland and the fact that neither the Ministry of the Environment nor the General Directorate for Environmental Protection had verified the hydrogeological model of the opencast mine presented by ZE PAK. Moreover, arguments raised by civil society against the decision, supported for example by an expert opinion prepared by Prof. Jan Popczyk, were considered groundless because "it is not the role of the permit required under the Water Law to analyse the purposefulness of a specific business undertaking".<sup>27</sup>

*I take photos of what the local ponds and meadows looked like some time ago and what they look like now. I travelled across the municipality. The meadows are dry, the soil is cracked. Trees growing in these meadows are drying out. Several years ago, there was water in these ponds and in these meadows. In 2015, most of the ponds were dry already. On my farm, two ponds vanished in April 2012 over two weeks. Before the opencast mine began to operate, they had been full of water which we used to water our vegetable garden. The water which is being pumped out from the mine should be treated and re-used, whereas at present it feeds the nearby river".*  
Piotr Krygier, local activist, owner of a farm in Galczyce (in the Wierzbinek municipality), who lives nearby the Tomistawice opencast mine.

Sadly, the justified concerns of local communities and conclusions from independent expert opinions pointing to the already serious hydrological problems in the region have not been taken into account in the relevant administrative decisions and in plans devised by the mine. Despite the fact that the Tomistawice opencast mine case is still being examined by the European Commission and European Parliament, the permit required under the Water Law has been issued. Organisations grouped in the "Rozwój TAK - Odkrywki NIE" Coalition point to a major threat posed by the incorrect application of the provisions of the Framework Water Directive in the procedure of issuing this type of permits for opencast mines in Poland, which is also evident in this case.

In the vicinity of the Tomistawice opencast mine, **small farmers and farm owners have for several years witnessed a shortage of water to water their crops**, which has forced them to reduce or abandon their agricultural activity and to backfill their wells. A small group of local activists from the Wierzbinek municipality is constantly monitoring the legal and administrative situation of the opencast mines. Some of them decided to take legal action to seek compensation from the mine for the losses they had suffered, however, to no avail.

In the Babiak municipality, civil movements have been striving for several years to block the launch of a new opencast mine in Dęby Szlacheckie. In 2015, they organised a municipal referendum to find out what the local community thought about the project. In total, 2,800 people took part in the referendum (the turnout was 42.94%), of which 2,527 voted against the planned investment.<sup>28</sup> The Babiak Municipality Council echoed the opinion voiced by civil society organisations and stressed that the mine's launch might have a strong negative impact on many socio-economic aspects of the municipality's functioning. **The municipal authorities decided to remove the mine's plans from the municipality's spatial development masterplan.** This amendment to the masterplan was approved by Wielkopolska's Marshal, and following a complaint submitted by the Konin Mine the amended masterplan was upheld by the Provincial Administrative Court in Poznań.<sup>29</sup> Local communities continue to launch actions to make their voice heard. The case is not over because the new "Wielkopolska region's zoning plan.

25 "RT-ON" foundation, *Petycja w sprawie kopalni Tomistawice uruchamia działania Komisji Petycji PE*, <https://rozwojtak-odkrywkinie.pl/component/k2/item/392-petycja-w-sprawie-kopalni-tomislawice-uruchamia> (accessed on 31.05.2019).

26 Announcement by the Director of the Regional Water Management Authority in Bydgoszcz, <https://wodypolskie.bip.gov.pl/fobjects/download/531429/s25c-919040208120-pdf.html> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

27 *Ibidem*.

28 Protocol providing the results of the municipal referendum of 21.06.2015, [http://eko-unia.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/protokol\\_zbiorczy\\_referendum\\_gminne\\_21\\_06\\_2015.pdf](http://eko-unia.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/protokol_zbiorczy_referendum_gminne_21_06_2015.pdf) (accessed on 20.05.2019).

29 Sławomir Zasadzki, *W gminie Babiak nie będzie kolejnej odkrywki*, Radio Poznań, 09.06.2018, <http://radiopoznan.fm/informacje/pozostale/w-gminie-babiak-nie-bedzie-kolejnej-odkrywki> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

Wielkopolska 2020+” mentions Dęby Szlacheckie, Ościstowo and other investments as public-interest investments.<sup>30</sup> The civil society organisations have made every effort to encourage the local community to speak up during the public consultations announced in 2018. It was emphasised that no strategic document or governmental programme describes those coal fields as strategic, that official documents merely point to potential opportunities, which is why referring to them as public-interest investments makes no sense. In addition, it was emphasised that including the prospective opencast mines in the zoning plan was not in line with the interests of the region’s residents and that lignite mining was no longer a strategic sector for Eastern Wielkopolska which was embarking on a transition.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, the comments presented by civil society representatives have not been taken into account.

*“The issue of the Dęby Szlacheckie opencast mine was raised for the first time in 2013. We were greatly surprised that it was a planned investment because we had not been notified of the intention to open an opencast mine in our municipality and so much was reflected in the local spatial development masterplan. The local community had a very limited knowledge of it. This was when we decided to find out more about it. First, the issue was examined by five municipal councillors, then we made contact with the local governor because he claimed that the local community was very much in favour of the opencast mines. We were totally surprised, from what we knew local residents had no idea that such preparations had been made and this was when we organised the referendum”. Wanda Radowska, informal civil movement in the Babiak municipality.*

The above examples indicate **that the situation of local communities, their arguments and the actual state of the environment are not being taken into account in decisions concerning the region.** The ZE PAK company has not made contact with local communities and to date has not launched any activities intended to reclaim the damaged land surrounding the Tomistawice mine.

## PROBLEMS:

- ▶ shrinking lignite fields which are expected to last only until 2025-2030

- ▶ low profitability of continued lignite mining and of retrofitting coal-fired power stations
- ▶ large unemployment rate compared with the rest of the region
- ▶ excessive dependence of the local job market on the mines and power stations owned by ZE PAK
- ▶ outflow of young people from the region and an ageing population
- ▶ health-related consequences affecting the local population caused by air pollution
- ▶ dependence of the local economy on activity that has a negative impact on climate
- ▶ location of mining sites in the immediate vicinity of protected areas
- ▶ environmental degradation and losses suffered by local communities as a result of increased drainage by the opencast mines’ expanding depression cones
- ▶ no compensation offered to local residents for losses and damage caused by mining
- ▶ social and legal conflicts surrounding the plans to expand the existing and to open new opencast mines, caused by the absence of dialogue between the mines’ management bodies and local communities, among other factors
- ▶ ZE PAK’s failure to meet the obligation to reclaim the land located in the vicinity of opencast mines.

## CHALLENGES:

- ▶ preparation of a coherent development strategy for the region that will foster its just transition
- ▶ the need to remedy the damage caused by environmental degradation as a result of the mine’s operation and to ensure active protection of the environment in line with national and European legal requirements
- ▶ compensating local communities for the economic losses they have suffered and the deteriorating living standards caused by the mine’s operation
- ▶ the need to create new jobs outside of the mining sector, to support micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses, to develop vocational education
- ▶ the voice of local communities should be taken into account in the process of devising the region’s development strategies
- ▶ protection of the population’s health
- ▶ the need to develop new energy technologies taking climate, air and natural resources into account
- ▶ winning society’s support for the coming changes.

<sup>30</sup> Wielkopolska Regional Assembly, *Wielkopolska’s zoning plan. Wielkopolska 2020+*, p. 201, [https://bip.umwww.pl/artykuly/2825215/pliki/20190612080135\\_10pzwptekst.pdf](https://bip.umwww.pl/artykuly/2825215/pliki/20190612080135_10pzwptekst.pdf) [accessed on 20.05.2019].

<sup>31</sup> Comments to *Wielkopolska’s zoning plan. Wielkopolska 2020+*, <http://odkrywka.info/index.php/2018/10/08/uwagi-do-planu-zagospodarowania-wielkopolski-2020/uwagi-do-projektu-pzw-2020www/> [accessed on 20.05.2019].



## II. CIVIL SOCIETY'S PERSPECTIVE

- ▶ Civil movements and non-governmental organisations have been the first to raise the issue of Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition.
- ▶ Civil movements recognise the region's potential for continued development thanks to an environmentally friendly power industry, if all aspects of social development are properly addressed.
- ▶ Civil society representatives are aware that transition is a long-term process to which "everyone should subscribe". Society's intensive participation in decision-making processes is important. All interested groups should have equal access to the new funds and emerging development opportunities.
- ▶ Reclamation of mining sites and their restoration to the pre-exploitation condition as much as possible should be a priority.
- ▶ Local communities speak of the need to offer support to miners in the form of retraining opportunities and assistance for them and their families, to ensure local development and create new jobs.

### Civil society engagement

It is very significant that **the first people to raise the issue of Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition in 2017 were a group of city activists from Konin**, most of whom hailed from non-governmental organisations such as the Akcja Konin and Zmieniamy Koninn associations and the Miasto Prowincjonalne foundation. During our interviews with them we found out that this issue was particularly dear to their hearts due to their strong involvement in local policies, their personal attachment to the place where they live and their ambi-

tion to achieve real change in order to improve the quality of life and to put an end to the region's socio-economic stagnation. According to Miłostawa Stępień from the Akcja Konin association, the fact that the Ościstowo opencast mine project still has not been granted an environmental decision has contributed to accelerating the debate on the region's transition. However, whether the mine is launched or not, in the coming years Eastern Wielkopolska needs to take very decisive actions to foster change in the region.

In June 2017, a conference titled "Konin. Powrót do przyszłości" [Konin. Back to the future] was held in Konin, organised by the "Rozwój TAK - Odkrywki NIE" foundation. This event is considered to have kick-started the debate on Konin's transition. The speakers included Sebastian Łukaszewski – deputy mayor of Konin, Miłostawa Stępień – representative of civil society, member of the Akcja Konin association, Katarzyna Dzióba – deputy mayor of Zabrze and Dariusz Szwed – foreign affairs advisor to the mayor of Słupsk, as well as members of trade unions, residents of Konin, and environmental activists. During the conference, a proposal was presented to launch a comprehensive debate on the future of Konin and the region that should welcome various participants. The topics raised during the meeting included Konin's potential, threats to the job market, the conditions for development of small and medium-sized businesses, and urban development that would take the economic transition into account. It was emphasised that a correctly implemented transition would trigger opportunities for the region's social, economic and technological development.<sup>32</sup>

In October 2017, the Miasto Prowincjonalne foundation organised a conference titled "Konin reStart" with the objective of formulating a set of recommendations for Konin and mobilising the participants to act jointly in order to implement them within the next couple of years. The organisers recognised the great potential of other proposed initiatives the civil society had

32 "RT-ON" foundation, <https://rozwojtak-odkrywkynie.pl/component/k2/item/268-konin-powrot-do-przeszlosci> (accessed on 20.05.2019).



View of the Kleczew opencast mine, photo by Sławomir Jankowski

already put forward, including those contained in strategic documents such as “Jaka jest przyszłość Konina? Foresight Konin 2050” drafted by Pracownia Miejska, “Budżet wrażliwy na płeć” [Gender-balanced budget] drafted by the Pełnym Głosem foundation, and “Obywatelska strategia rozwoju miasta Konin 2020” [The citizens’ strategy for the development of the city of Konin to 2020] drafted by Akcja Konin.

In the context of transition planning, the document “Foresight Konin 2050” drafted in 2015 by Pracownia Miejska (a Konin-based urban development consultancy) is particularly worth noting. It lays down four scenarios for Konin’s development until 2050. According to the report’s authors, when struggling with the most serious challenges posed by the diminishing role of the mining and energy industry in the region, they made “every effort to lay the ground for a comprehensive, deliberate and daring transition of the city”.<sup>33</sup> It is particularly worth noting that the scenarios were pre-

pared on the basis of public consultations the team had carried out in the Konin county with young people, senior citizens, entrepreneurs and representatives of municipalities. One of the scenarios proposes that the city’s and the surrounding region’s development should be based on renewable energy sources (RES) and envisages the creation of an “Energy Technology Centre” dealing with technology, research, incubation and testing of innovative solutions for the power industry.

Civil society representatives have taken part in meetings of the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition since it was established by the European Commission in 2017. During the first working meeting held in February 2018 in Brussels, the Konin region was represented by Miłostawa Stępień from the Akcja Konin association and Jarosław Koźlarek from the Miasto Prowincjonalne foundation. This was before the Marshal’s Office officially applied for Eastern Wielkopolska’s accession to the Platform.

<sup>33</sup> Pracownia Miejska, *Jaka przyszłość czeka Konin? Foresight Konin 2050*, Konin 2015, p. 11, <https://www.slideshare.net/pracowniamiejska/konin2050-raportkoncowy-53865951> [accessed on 20.05.2019].

Another important step in the public debate over the region's just transition came with the conference organised in October 2018 by the Akcja Konin association and the Miasto Prowincjonalne foundation in collaboration with the Polish Green Network and the Ecological Association "EKO-UNIA". The conference was titled "Czy sprawiedliwa transformacja Wielkopolski Wschodniej jest możliwa? Scenariusze rozwoju regionu 2018-2030" [Is a just transition of Eastern Wielkopolska possible? Scenarios for the region's development in 2018-2030] and attempted to assess the opportunities and methods for implementing transition in the region. Local and regional governments were represented by Joanna Misiak-Kędziora, deputy mayor of Turek, and Maciej Sytek, the then deputy marshal of Wielkopolska.<sup>34</sup>

*Non-governmental organisations were the first to show interest in this topic. I always stress that this type of dialogue is worthwhile, it is a good idea to talk and support each other in our joint actions. I think that cooperation is an added value in whatever we do. In this case, perhaps there are things we would never know about and would never try to solve without the contribution of the non-governmental organisations. I myself used to be involved in the non-governmental movement, so these issues are dear to my heart. It seems to me that this cooperation is excellent and may only contribute to a better transition". Maciej Sytek, Regional Government's Plenipotentiary for Eastern Wielkopolska's Restructuring at the Regional Development Agency in Konin*

## The vision of just transition

Civil movements recognise the region's potential for continued development based on an environmentally friendly power industry, provided that all aspects of social development are taken into account. The local organisations which have been the most active in promoting the issue of transition from the very beginning, i.e. the Akcja Konin association, the Miasto Prowincjonalne foundation and the ZmieniaMY Konin association, continue to cooperate, support each other in their actions and promote a coherent message, in which they are assisted by national organisations including the Polish Green Network.

*At present, devising a detailed strategy is our most important goal. We are calling for a proper public consultation and a transition plan that would be devised*

*based on the results. We insist that civil society's demands should be taken into account, we need to make sure that the voice of all interested parties is heard, we want decisions to be made not only at the political level and to be based on comprehensive consultations. Trade union's involvement in this process is also very important. We understand just transition as a smooth passage of the city and the region from coal-based economy towards decentralised sources of development. However, this should not happen at the cost of the people and the employees. We have identified several threats – the most important ones include the risk of unemployment and the risk of cities losing their tax revenues. We are also trying to present transition as a positive project because its popular understanding is overshadowed by a depressing prospect of mines being closed and the region becoming degraded". Jarostaw Koźlerek, the ZmieniaMY Konin association, the Miasto Prowincjonalne foundation*

## Strategy and funding

Miłostawa Stępień from the Akcja Konin association emphasises that it is important to devise a strategy and to diversify the sources of funding of the process as a whole:

*"We see this as an initiative in the making because we keep saying that we will undergo a transition but for the time being we don't know what it will look like. The question of funding is important because – in my view – funding should come from different sources. These should include governmental, European and local funds made available to support the project".*

Launching local sources of funding, for example in the form of cooperative projects or crowdfunding initiatives, is a good idea as it helps local communities feel like agents of change rather than objects and empowers them. That being said, **all interested groups should have equal access to the new funds and emerging development opportunities.**

Civil society organisations and movements are aware of the problem of environmental degradation caused by mining activity, such as soil degradation, loss of water, disappearance of lakes, for which local communities (e.g. farmers) have not been compensated. It is obvious that these losses should be made up for in some way and that a portion of funds coming to the region should be directly earmarked for this purpose. An even distribution of the financial capital and of other resources is another significant element of just transition.

<sup>34</sup> Alliance of Associations Polish Green Network, *A just transition of Eastern Wielkopolska*, 28.09.2018, <http://zielonasiec.pl/2018/09/28/sprawiedliwa-transformacja-wielkopolski-wschodniej/> [accessed on 20.05.2019].



**“** A transition that is just for all of the region’s residents should be mainly about improving the heavily disturbed water management. We have recently witnessed the effects of this disturbance in the form of droughts and disappearance of numerous water flows and basins. Without water the entire region will die, and no industry will thrive in it – this also applies to the power and mining industry. The current priority is to have lignite mining banned due to the fact that the mining uses up a gigantic volume of water, and to create water reservoirs, watergates on drainage installations and other similar solutions to prevent water from flowing out from the area”. Wanda Radowska, informal civil movement in the Babiak municipality

Members of the civil movement active in the Babiak municipality emphasise that the funds earmarked for the transition processes should primarily be channelled to the people and should not be spent on supporting the development of big companies such as ZE PAK. In order to qualify to receive support in line with the principles of just transition, **such companies should first of all reclaim the natural environment to enable the local residents to conduct other economic activities.** Only then should they proceed to implement renewable projects using the remaining funds. Representatives of the movement have a similar vision of the process of devising a just transition strategy, which should primarily be focused on resolving water-related problems affecting the region, followed by putting forward new energy solutions. Civil society organisations and movements should become involved in this process at the conceptual stage, whereas public institutions – supported by universities and research institutes – should plan the strategy as a whole, supervise its implementation and ensure an even distribution of funds (priority should be given to local communities rather than companies).

**“** The question of what will happen with people who lose their jobs is an extremely important element of the just transition debate. This is why just transition should be prepared in the long-term perspective of many years to come. It should provide an answer to this question. It is crucial for this process to include individuals who lose their job and to offer specific solutions to them. This is perhaps one of the most difficult elements of this process”. Mitostawa Stępień, the Akcja Konin association

### A multiannual and democratic process

Civil society representatives are aware that **transition is a multiannual process that should be endorsed,**

**or at least approved of by everyone.** Therefore, comprehensive cooperation should be based on a form of communication that lets people discuss the differences in their points of view and fosters compromise solutions. **It is crucial to ensure a broad participation of citizens in decision-making processes** which should not be concentrated in the hands of a small group of decision-makers or focused on one specific region, for example Konin. This can be achieved by way of public consultations during which the residents will feel that they have real influence on the decisions being taken. For energy transition to be truly just and based on solidarity, all the social partners should be present at the negotiations table, including representatives of local and regional government and local business, the trade unions, expert scientists and civil society organisations.

**“** In my view, just transition is a great opportunity for Eastern Wielkopolska, not only in the context of the energy sector, but mainly in terms of the socio-economic changes it will entail. In a situation of a profound development crisis in this portion of the region, the outflow of residents, especially young people, problems in the job market and other challenges as a result of which the residents are dissatisfied with their region, just transition offers an opportunity to lift the economy out of the crisis and restore local pride. The biggest challenge is to avoid falling into another development trap – when departing from the industrial mono-culture we need to make every effort to diversify the new wave of Eastern Wielkopolska’s development as much as possible to include several different industries. We cannot afford to once again become dependent on one big industrial plant. In my opinion, for a just transition of Eastern Wielkopolska to succeed, aside from economic activities and cooperation focused on employees and residents, it is necessary that we take care of our future – the youngest residents of our region. By taking care of their development, education, skills improvement and giving them a chance to work and act locally, we can be more confident that in the future they will choose to remain in Konin and the surrounding area”. Agata Kuźmińska, local activist, civil society representative

### An inclusive process that protects the people’s interests

According to local communities, for example in the Babiak municipality, the **current priority should be to reclaim the post-mining sites and restore them to the pre-exploitation condition as much as possible.** This also applies to the heavily disturbed hydrologi-



cal situation which has been driving economic losses and affecting the whole region. The legal obligation to reclaim the sites and restore the environment rests on the company. In this context, increased pressure from the administration is necessary because to date they have remained passive. Local communities living outside the big cities view just transition also as **support to miners to help them retrain, assistance for them and their families, support for local development, creation of new jobs**. At the same time, they argue that no transition is possible as long as the decline of the local economy continues, the losses are not compensated for and the current difficult situation persists.

It should be emphasised that **the visions of the region's development relate to the future and there is a shortage of solutions that could be applied immediately** in connection with the risk of ZE PAK employees losing their jobs. Therefore, there is an urgent need to work out solutions to protect the local community from negative consequences of such developments.

*"We believe that having entered our territory, the mine has a clear set of obligations to meet, including the reclamation of those sites and restoring them to their former pre-exploitation condition. What is being proposed is a transition in which the mining company will take over the funds provided by the European Commission and finance the development of, for example, renewable energy sources. We believe that this is unjust and unfair because these funds are public funds which should be offered to the residents, for example to miners, to help them retrain and find new jobs. The next step should involve enabling each resident to install solar panels or photovoltaic cells on their house".* Wanda Radowska, informal civil movement in the Babiak municipality

### A sustainable economy

The civil society's visions of the region's transition are focused on the development of an innovative, pro-social and pro-environmental economy. This involves a modern development of both cities and rural areas where farming and food production can thrive. The civil society sees **a major potential for developing a power industry based on low-carbon solutions and energy obtained from renewable sources** because the region has a sufficient human, infrastructural and intellectual capital. The visions of the region's future present Eastern Wielkopolska as a region whose economy continues to be based on the generation of energy.

*"Transition needs to be an inclusive rather than exclusive process. The example of Eastern Wielkopolska shows that most of the activity happens here in Konin, whereas the weaker or less active communities are excluded from the process. Examples include the farming and rural communities which are less numerous and are perceived to have no political significance. They deserve to be supported and taken into account as part of this process".* Miłostawa Stępień, the Akcja Konin association

The Akcja Konin association has defined the following prerequisites for a just transition to be possible:

- ▶ having a vision of the transition and the intention to implement it,
- ▶ cooperation above divisions,
- ▶ compensation offered to local residents for the losses they have suffered as a result of the economic changes and environmental degradation,
- ▶ a grassroots process based on public consultations,
- ▶ a decision-making process that involves multiple stakeholders and respect for democratic rules of decision-making,
- ▶ inclusion of communities from outside the big cities in the process,
- ▶ support for workers losing their jobs,
- ▶ a clearly stated objective to replace the economy based on exploitation of the environment with a sustainable economy.

### Challenges as seen from the civil society's perspective

**A strategy may be absent.** The civil society groups are worried that a development plan based on the principles of just transition may not materialise. The region's public sentiment needs to be taken into account because it may not be favourable in the context of the planned changes. A major effort is necessary to convince the residents of towns and villages as well as the various organisations including trade unions that the process change can be a positive development. So

far, the transition debates have mainly involved representatives of regional and local government and a small number of city activists, which indicates that winning support for the process from the society as a whole is necessary. **It is also important to see the difference between the notions of energy transition and just transition. The former mainly relates to technological aspects, whereas the latter relates to the broad social context.**

In June 2019, non-governmental organisations called on the Prime Minister to support the creation, as quickly as possible, of a clear strategy for Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition. In their document titled "3P: Plan, Partycypacja, Porozumienie" they requested the Prime Minister to establish a just transition round table to enable local residents to decide on the direction of their region's transition, and to enable citizens to have early and open access to information on activities planned by the mining and energy industry and the state.<sup>35</sup> The request was a reaction to local media reports on planned lay-offs at the ZE PAK SA Group. The situation was alarming because at the moment, no new

jobs and no support programmes are available to dismissed workers. The document was signed by the following associations: Akcja Konin, ZmieniaMY Konin, Eko Przyjezierze, Eko-Unia as well as the Polish Green Network and the "Rozwój TAK – Odkrywki NIE" foundation.

**Exclusion of communities living outside big cities from decision-making processes.** In public consultations, the voice of farming communities and residents of lake districts should be taken into account. At present, the economic problems they face as a result of environmental degradation caused by mining are being ignored in the transition debates. This also means that their interests and needs may be overlooked in the distribution of the funds that will be available to Eastern Wielkopolska in connection with its planned transition.

**No priority given to environmental protection issues.** So far, the debates on the region's future and transition have omitted such environmental issues as the shortage of water in the region or the need to resolve these problems and to have the mining and power industry compensate the local communities for the losses suffered.

<sup>35</sup> Press release by the Alliance of Associations Polish Green Network, 28.06.2019, <http://zielonasiec.pl/2019/06/28/kiedy-powstana-plany-sprawiedliwej-transformacji-dla-regionow-gorniczych/> [accessed on 28.06.2019].

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

- ▶ Inspired by local non-governmental organisations, the regional government has become involved in the issue of Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition.
- ▶ Eastern Wielkopolska has joined the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition and submitted a selection of projects to the European Commission for approval and implementation.
- ▶ One success of the regional government involves the signing of the "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition" by more than forty entities from the region representing local and regional authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organisations. The signatories recognise the importance of working towards a just transition while taking into account sustainable development and the voice of the civil society.
- ▶ The stakeholders of transition have widely divergent interests. It is necessary to overcome these divergences as otherwise it will be difficult for some stakeholders to be constructive participants in the just transition process if at the same time they continue pushing through new opencast mines despite objections voiced by the local communities and the necessity to phase out coal.
- ▶ As part of the transition process, it is important for local and regional authorities to maintain the region's status as an energy generation region, ensure new jobs and revenues for local governments and foster an improvement in the residents' quality of life.

### Actions by Wielkopolska's regional government

Inspired by local non-governmental organisations, the Wielkopolska Marshal's Office became interested in the issue of Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition in 2017. Worried about the uncertain situation of the mining and energy industry and the related threats to the future of Eastern Wielkopolska, in March 2018 members of the region's executive body headed by Maciej Sytek passed a resolution to establish a task force for restructuring the economic potential of the Konin subregion at the Economy Department of the Marshal's Office. It was agreed that the task force would be composed of representatives of various departments of the Marshal's Office and its mission would involve "working out recommendations for the subregion's local government, its local economic self-government bodies and its sector-specific professional self-government councils, whose implementation would contribute to a significant change in the local job market and boost the subregion's economic potential".<sup>36</sup> During a meeting with journalists in June 2018, Maciej Sytek declared that the changes which would be proposed by the regional government would be subject to comprehensive public consultations so as to *"make Konin, Koto, Turek and Stupca (...) independent of the power industry"* and to help them *"avoid the consequences borne by many regions when one specific industry collapsed"*.<sup>37</sup>

Having established the task force, the Marshal's Office submitted a request to the European Commission to allow Eastern Wielkopolska to join the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition (the so-called Coal Platform). During the Platform's second working meeting in July 2018, the Konin region was represented by both civil society and the local and regional government. The situation was similar during the Platform's third meeting held in November 2018, when bilateral talks on Eastern Wielkopolska joining the Coal Platform took place.

36 Resolution no. 5085/2018 by Wielkopolska's executive body of 27 March 2018, [https://bip.umwww.pl/artykuly/2823988/pliki/20180427090527\\_5085.pdf](https://bip.umwww.pl/artykuly/2823988/pliki/20180427090527_5085.pdf) (accessed on 20.05.2019).

37 Quoted after: Editors of Turek24, 16.06.2018, <https://turek24.com.pl/maciej-sytek-sniadanie-prasowe-wielkopolska-wschodnia/> (accessed on 20.05.2019).

The establishment, in January 2019, of **the office of the Regional Government's Plenipotentiary for Eastern Wielkopolska's Restructuring** at the Regional Development Agency in Konin was a major step that confirmed the regional government's commitment to the process of the region's just transition. Former deputy marshal of the region Maciej Sytek was appointed to this office and his new tasks included establishing a transition task force to assist local governments, companies and communities in the transition process. In this way, the task force established in Konin was to take over the functions of the task force that had previously been created at the Marshal's Office. Maciej Sytek was also appointed head of the Regional Development Agency and as part of his responsibilities announced the launch of transition activities in the region.

### **Eastern Wielkopolska joined the Coal Platform on 28 March 2019 in the Polish Country Team formula.**

In the opinion of civil society representatives, the fact that the region was granted the status of the Platform's member is an important achievement, especially considering that alongside the Marshal's Office, civil society organisations spared no effort to support the process. Currently Eastern Wielkopolska, like Silesia, has its own task force under the Platform. This has paved the way for direct meetings with the European Commission and for submitting and negotiating concrete projects.

### **The Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition**

One of the major achievements of the Regional Development Agency in Konin in the first six months of its work on transition involved initiating and signing (on 3 April 2019) of the "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition". **The Agreement was signed by more than forty entities from the region representing the local and regional authorities, the private sector and non-governmental organisations,** marking an important success and a milestone on the road to cooperation. The signatories recognise the importance of acting for the benefit of just transition while taking into account sustainable development and the voice of civil society. They have declared their willingness to cooperate in implementing new initiatives and investments in the region and under the Coal Platform. The Agreement is voluntary, open to new entities and its actions are coordinated by the Regional Development Agency.

It is worth emphasising that the Agreement was signed by a highly diversified group of stakeholders. The local and regional government signatories included the mayor of Konin, the head and deputy head of the Regional Development Agency, as well as county administrators, town mayors and municipality administrators from the four counties of Koło, Konin, Stępca and Turek. The civil society and business signatories included the president of the Akcja Konin association, deputy president of the ZmieniaMy Konin association, a proxy of the Studio Inicjatyw Samorządowych foundation, presidents of county Economic Chambers, the president of the State University of Applied Sciences in Konin, the president of the Polish Association of Village Leaders and of the Self-Government Society, the president of the Wielkopolska Association of Village Leaders, representatives of the Guild of Various Crafts from four counties, the president of the Kłodawa Salt Mine and the then president and vice-president of the management board of ZE PAK.

At the conference during which the Agreement was signed, the mayor of Konin Piotr Korytkowski described the significance of this event in the following way:

*"We, local and regional government officials and entrepreneurs from the Konin region, will be seen and heard by the European Commission only if our voice is consistent and strong and our plans and projects well-coordinated. To achieve this, we need to tighten our cooperation and use the opportunity offered by the creation of the EU Platform for Coal Regions in Transition and the support of the Regional Development Agency. This is the only way – involving joint efforts and understanding for the needs of each one of us – for us to achieve an unprecedented absorption of EU funds by our region".<sup>38</sup>*

Alongside this, a letter of intent was signed regarding cooperation between Konin, the Wielkopolska region, the Regional Development Agency, the ZE PAK company and the Konin Economic Chamber in implementation of activities connected with transition processes. The letter contained a declaration of readiness to cooperate in the following fields:

*"[...] in the field of development of low-carbon transportation, the construction of a hydrogen research centre and an electrolysis installation to produce hydrogen, projects connected with electromobility, as well as other projects focused on renewable sources of energy such as photovoltaic installations and wind farms and geothermal power stations".<sup>39</sup> Mayor Korytkowski stressed that these projects "are in line with European trends regarding the development of low-carbon economy and with*

<sup>38</sup> Konin City Hall, announcement published on 4.04.2019, <http://www.konin.pl/index.php/jeden-news-new/porozumienie-na-rzecz-sprawiedliwej-transformacji-energetycznej.html> [accessed on 20.05.2019].

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.





View of the Józwin opencast mine, photo by Sławomir Jankowski

*the objectives of the EU's energy policy according to which 80% of electricity produced in the EU should come from renewable energy sources by 2050. This is an ambitious goal. It is difficult to achieve by countries such as Poland, especially in regions such as Eastern Wielkopolska. However, it makes us feel sure that in the coming years the available EU funds will include funds for implementation of pro-environmental development projects and investments in the high technology sector".<sup>40</sup>*

Signatories to both agreements are now facing major challenges which include working out a formula for further cooperation, initiating work on a transition plan and involving all interested stakeholders. Considering the size of ZE PAK's business activity and the impact it has on the residents of Eastern Wielkopolska and the natural environment, the company's participation in the agreements is a positive development in the context of transition processes in the region. The company's corporate communication department has issued a statement in which the company refers to a European Commission press release regarding the creation of the Coal Platform and recognises the opportunity this initiative offers to the region.

The statement suggests that the company is aware of the need to carry out pro-environmental activities and to act for the benefit of just transition, and at the same time it emphasises that to be able to continue to be a competitive company in its sector, it counts on support, including financial support, from the state and from the Coal Platform. The statement from ZE PAK also reads that the current situation on the energy market encourages the company to look for new low-carbon sources of energy to serve as an alternative to coal. Therefore, hoping that Eastern Wielkopolska will receive support as a coal mining region, ZE PAK has prepared several investment proposals that are in line with the transition's objectives.

However, it should be noted that ZE PAK and the remaining stakeholders of the transition process have numerous divergent interests. It will be necessary to overcome these divergences because otherwise the company can hardly be a constructive partner in the just transition process while at the same time pushes through new opencast mines regardless of the objection voiced by local communities and the need to phase out coal.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

### The Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition:

- ▶ signed by more than forty entities from Eastern Wielkopolska representing the public sector, the private sector and non-governmental organisations
- ▶ an important element of negotiations under the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition, demonstrating the region's unity and readiness to undertake a just socio-economic transition
- ▶ signed above political divisions – its signatories declare that transition is necessary, and they intend to become involved in it
- ▶ stresses the need to use support mechanisms for Eastern Wielkopolska to enable the region to develop a power industry based on renewable sources of energy
- ▶ is open for other entities to join in.

### One voice in Brussels and projects focused on transition

The signed Agreement was presented a few days later during the fourth working meeting of the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition held in Brussels in April 2019. The team representing Wielkopolska included representatives of three sectors – the local and regional government sector, the civil society sector and the business sector. According to the civil society representatives, in Brussels the team from Wielkopolska clearly demonstrated that the region would speak in one strong voice.

During the meeting in Brussels, talks were held between representatives of the Regional Development Agency and the European Commission regarding projects that could potentially receive funding from various EU funds. The process of collecting and preparing projects was launched at the beginning of 2019. This was when the Agency's head met with representatives of the region's municipalities, explained the transition concept to them and invited them to submit project proposals. The Agency assumed the role of the institution in charge of collecting projects and negotiating their content and financial aspects with the European Commission. During the meeting in Brussels in April, twenty-one pro-

jects were presented, including three proposed by the city of Konin, two – by the Kleczew municipality, eight by the Agency and eight by ZE PAK.

The projects can be divided into several main categories:<sup>41</sup>

#### → **devising the region's development strategy**

This is an element of a more comprehensive project focused on developing Eastern Wielkopolska's regional brand. The main goal of this strategy development exercise is to boost the region's economic potential in the field of broadly understood energy transition.

#### → **transportation**

The project envisages the creation of an integrated "green" public transportation system by building public transportation networks in the region and developing environmentally friendly means of public transportation.

#### → **education**

Understood in particular as improving competences and skills of workers employed in the fuel and energy sectors and expanding young people's education opportunities to include specialisations focused on new technologies.

#### → **reclamation of former opencast mining sites**

The project carried out in the Kleczew municipality involves reclamation of a lignite excavation site and development of recreation and leisure infrastructure there.

#### → **"green" financial support for companies and the public and private sector**

Financial support includes subsidies and loans offered to micro-, small- and medium-sized companies to finance investments in renewable energy sources (RES), co-funding of purchase and assembly of new RES installations and micro-installations on single-family and multi-family residential buildings, co-funding of energy efficiency improvement in public buildings.

#### → **energy generation**

This category includes the creation of a business and research incubator for hydrogen technologies, the creation of the "Zielona Energia - Konin" energy cluster, installation of heat pumps with photovoltaic systems in public buildings, development of geothermal energy installations. The projects submitted by ZE PAK include the planned construction of photovoltaic farms on reclaimed post-mining sites, a heat

<sup>41</sup> Information provided by the Regional Development Agency in Konin.

storage facility to heat the city of Konin, wind farms on reclaimed sites, an energy storage facility to support RES installations built on ZE PAK's premises, a logistic centre combined with the construction of photovoltaic farms on the roofs, as well as hydrogen generation, storage and distribution infrastructure.<sup>42</sup>

## → tourism and culture

Projects in this category include initiatives such as the creation of a green tourist trail in Eastern Wielkopolska, organisation of an annual international film festival, development of art house cinemas, plein-air workshops for painters and sculptors. Cultural activities are intended to be part of a more comprehensive initiative focused on cultural re-definition of post-industrial areas in Eastern Wielkopolska.

Because the project concepts had to be prepared for presentation within a short time, most of them are previously devised initiatives that are consistent with the objectives of just transition. Unfortunately, in this set of projects only minor emphasis was placed on the challenge of retraining the miners who may change or lose their jobs. At present, details of the submitted project proposals are being clarified and implementation is likely to start in the new 2021–2027 financial perspective (although some projects may be launched under the current 2014–2020 financial perspective).

## The vision of just transition

Over the last year, the region has seen several important conferences and seminars focused on the future of Eastern Wielkopolska, organised on the initiative of both civil society organisations and local and regional government structures. The second half of 2018 in particular abounded in events, which showed that social mobilisation in the region was accelerating. This was also connected with the then ongoing process of Eastern Wielkopolska joining the Coal Platform and with the coming local elections.<sup>43</sup>

**In the context of the transition process, the regional government considers it highly important to maintain the region's status as an energy generation region.**

This has inspired the idea to create the "Dolina Energii" [Energy Valley] brand for the region. For many years, the development of this part of Wielkopolska had been driven by the mining and power industries, and it would not be right to ignore the region's heritage and culture when discussing its transition. In the context of climate change, the rapidly depleting lignite fields and ongoing technological change, Eastern Wielkopolska wishes to turn to environmentally friendly energy generation and solutions that can contribute to phasing out coal and will not put a strain on natural resources. Examples include energy generation from gas, biomass, wind, solar, geothermal sources and hydrogen. Investments in the development of hydrogen technologies, which are being planned in the region, are viewed as a genuine and very promising alternative. The H2Lab – Hydrogen Application Centre project has been officially introduced as an element of the efforts to build an incubation and support system for high-quality projects based on hydrogen technologies.

The regional authorities know the region's existing human capital comprising skilled workers, engineers and power industry specialists who could remain in the power industry if this type of transition was implemented. This is a positive aspect of the process – the local population would be spared the trouble of having to retrain and look for new jobs in completely different sectors of the economy. Plans are being made to **implement the region's transition in such a way as to maintain the working culture** it has been known for. One obstacle concerns the current shortage of well-trained professionals on the job market, but this is going to change when education opportunities are improved, and the job market becomes more attractive.

The operation of mines generates major tax revenues for local municipalities. This is why the regional government has repeatedly emphasised that when creating the new economic reality it is necessary to make sure that the municipalities maintain their revenues. For the region, the transition from energy generated from lignite to other energy sources is merely an element of a more comprehensive shift. Transition is viewed as an opportunity for comprehensive development:

<sup>42</sup> For more on projects submitted by ZE PAK see the document "Udział ZE PAK SA w transformacji energetycznej Regionu Wielkopolski Wschodniej", [http://zepak.com.pl/upload/Udzia\\_ZE\\_PAK\\_SA\\_w\\_transformacji\\_energetycznej\\_Regionu\\_Wielkopolski\\_Wschodniej.pdf](http://zepak.com.pl/upload/Udzia_ZE_PAK_SA_w_transformacji_energetycznej_Regionu_Wielkopolski_Wschodniej.pdf) [accessed on 20.05.2019].

<sup>43</sup> The following events are worth noting:

- the seminar entitled "Eastern Wielkopolska's Transition. People – the economy – investments" organised by the Institute for Structural Research, Edinburgh Centre for Carbon Innovation and Wielkopolska's Marshal's Office (23 October 2018, Konin),
- presentation of the new vision of the city's and the region's development entitled "The Konin Energy Valley" by the then contender and current mayor of the city of Konin – Piotr Korytkowski (October 2018, Konin),
- the conference entitled "Science Meets Regions. The Konin subregion's economic transition – direction hydrogen" organised by the European Commission, Wielkopolska's regional government, the State University of Applied Sciences in Konin and the Regional Development Agency (12 December 2018, Konin),
- workshops on strategy building for "Konin – a green energy city" (June 2019, Konin).



- ▶ economic development involving the power industry but also the automotive sector, the construction sector (including thermal modernisation of buildings), support for start-ups, establishment of research and business institutions, development of micro-, small- and medium-sized companies;
- ▶ social development, e.g. development of education, cultural life and a variety of public and social services.

**//** In January 2019, Wielkopolska's regional government decided join the Just Transition initiative in Eastern Wielkopolska. The transition's goal is to ensure a safe and smooth passage from lignite-based energy to a modern-day low-carbon economy based on energy generated from renewable sources (RES), in line with sustainable development and respect for the civil society. In the case of Eastern Wielkopolska and many other coal regions and former coal regions in Europe, transition does not merely relate to energy changes but also to a comprehensive socio-economic shift, thereby giving the region a new development impetus".<sup>44</sup> Statement issued by the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly regarding the Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska initiative

The Regional Development Agency in Konin has defined three main objectives for Eastern Wielkopolska's energy transition:

- ▶ ensuring jobs

It is particularly important to ensure continuity of employment and decent living standards to the region's residents.

- ▶ ensuring revenues to local governments

The new economic reality should ensure a similar level of revenues to local municipalities.

- ▶ improving the local population's quality of life by offering a wide range of public services

The region's transition is expected to include a comprehensive socio-economic development contributing to an improvement of the quality of life in this part of Wielkopolska.

Deputies to the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly are aware of the challenges Eastern Wielkopolska is facing in connection with the depleting coal fields, the decrease in the number of people working in the power industry and the related threat of a socio-economic decline. In early June 2019, they held an extraordinary meeting of the Assembly in Konin, during which they discussed the region's problems and development opportunities, as well as actions that the regional government could take. Apart from the Assembly deputies, representatives of the region's executive bodies and the plenipotentiary for Eastern Wielkopolska's restructuring, the debate was also attended by local government officials, representatives of farming communities and trade union activists. A joint "Statement of the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly on the initiative of a Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska" was agreed during the meeting. It reads that:

*"The Wielkopolska Regional Assembly recommends and supports activities intended to make Eastern Wielkopolska a leader and initiator of innovative solutions in the field of renewable energy, hydrogen projects, as well as electromobility, economic and infrastructural projects".<sup>45</sup>*

The importance of past events was emphasised during the debate, including the fact that Eastern Wielkopolska had joined the Coal Platform, and the signing of the "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition" by representatives of various sectors and groups. In addition, the deputies called for stepping up cooperation between all stakeholders at the local, regional and national level.

**//** In the nearest future, just transition will mainly involve implementation of activities and projects focused on low-carbon solutions, improvement of air quality, environmental protection, re-naturalisation of post-mining sites, their reclamation, revitalisation of agricultural land, as well as restoration of water resources. Other initiatives will include implementation of economic, infrastructural, social and cultural projects, as well as initiatives intended to offer assistance programmes to workers dismissed from the fuel and energy sector, for example helping them to retrain and improve their skills and competences. These plans correspond with the stated objectives of the initiative of a Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska, according to which the transition period is a perfect moment not only

<sup>44</sup> Resolution no. VIII / 131 / 19 of the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly of 3 June 2019 on the adoption of the Assembly's statement regarding the initiative of a Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska, <https://www.umwww.pl/attachments/article/58560/stanowisko%20sejmiku%20Konin,%203.06.2019.pdf> (accessed on 10.06.2019).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*.



*for significantly reducing emissions, but also for moving on to the next level of economic development, i.e. the so-called Economy 4.0. based on innovative environmentally friendly technologies”.*<sup>46</sup> Statement issued by the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly regarding the initiative of a Just Transition of Eastern Wielkopolska

## Challenges as seen from the local and regional government's perspective

**Vagueness of the term.** Understanding the term ‘just transition’ is not easy. According to Maciej Sytek from the Regional Development Agency, the concept is the hardest to define if various needs of different groups are taken into account. Farmers, miners, residents of cities, towns and villages have different expectations of the transition. The Agency’s head argues that the most important challenge involves the **creation of a proper model of transition which would most likely require many compromises from all interested parties**. For example, farmers living in the vicinity of a mine would like the mining process to be abandoned immediately, while miners would like it to continue. Due to the fact that transition is expected to cover all economic and social aspects, maintaining interpersonal contacts in workplaces is important – one example of this concerns miners for whom losing their job is tantamount to losing an important aspect of their identity. The Agency considers it important to work out, in cooperation with all interested stakeholders, a definition of what transition actually implies and what they, as the region’s representatives, intend to jointly achieve by implementing it according to a formula which would be unique to Wielkopolska. According to Maciej Sytek, caution is advised in defining the notion.

**The long-term nature of the process.** According to the Regional Development Agency, Eastern Wielkopolska is facing the challenge of boosting the creation micro-, small- and medium-sized businesses not only in the current EU financial perspective but also in the subsequent ones. On the one hand, the region intends to attract investors to build big industrial plants in selected 3-4 sectors of the economy, and on the other it plans to develop local enterprise, which may take up to 10-20 years. The Agency’s representatives are aware that the process will take a long time and therefore they are rather sceptical about excessive optimism on the part of civil society representatives.

**“** Transition is a long-term process, a long way to go. It requires clear-cut goals that need to be formulated and included in the strategy. Any stakeholder willing to join the process is more than welcome. This is why we talk to everyone. The fact that we talk for example to the Polish Green Network, to organisations dealing with climate change, makes us aware that the process will take a long time and that a lot needs to be done”. Marek Sytek, Regional Government’s Plenipotentiary for Eastern Wielkopolska’s Restructuring at the Regional Development Agency in Konin

**Support from the state is required.** Deputies to the Wielkopolska Regional Assembly have called on the region’s executive body to prepare financial support programmes in the current and future EU financial perspective. These programmes should be targeted exclusively at Eastern Wielkopolska. In addition, the deputies called on the Polish government to urgently launch work on devising a compensation programme for miners and power industry employees, with conditions similar to those offered to miners in Silesia under the EU Council Decision of 10 December 2010 on State aid to facilitate the closure of uncompetitive coal mines. They also called for “extending support programmes to include municipalities and counties located in Eastern Wielkopolska and giving priority to actions fostering these areas’ development”.<sup>47</sup> The regional government has admitted that without early retirement benefits and financial support to help the workers to voluntarily give up their mining sector jobs, as well as other forms of public aid, it will be difficult to implement a just transition in the region.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main and **the most important task for Eastern Wielkopolska is to devise a transition plan, which should include a long-term strategy for the region as well as a short-term plan to remedy the potential job market problems.** Another challenge is to work out a formula for implementing the plan in a way that takes into account the needs and interests of all stakeholders. There is also an urgent need to find solutions to shield the local community from negative effects of the changes as much as possible, for example by preparing effective retraining programmes for workers losing their jobs. The fact that the regional government is looking for investors is a positive development and confirms that the transition plan should include investment strategies as well.

Major divergences between ZE PAK and the local communities are evident. One example of this concerns the civil society's objection to opencast mines. ZE PAK can hardly be a constructive partner in the just transition process while at the same time it pushes through new opencast mines against the will of the local community. As regards the expected layoffs at ZE PAK, the company does not seem to have a plan to guarantee a smooth transition of workers to other sectors of the economy and to offer some form of social protection to them. The problem is additionally complicated by the fact that so far, no alternative jobs have been created in the region. Moreover, in its official statement issued in April 2019 regarding its decision to join the transition process, the company stressed that it was willing to shift towards renewable energy provided that it receives major financial support from public funds. This expectation may be impossible to meet, for example due to the EU legislation which limits the possibility of the state granting aid to companies. On the other hand, there is a risk that ZE PAK may monopolise the transition process because a major portion of the projects that Eastern Wielkopolska has submitted to the Coal Platform are ZE PAK's commercial initiatives which are likely to consume most of the funds available. The Polish Green Network supports the opinion of Eastern Wielkopolska's local communities which argue that funds

earmarked for supporting the transition should mainly be channelled to the local communities and local and regional governments, whereas commercial companies should use loans and other financing opportunities.

Signatories to the "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition" are now facing important tasks which include working out a formula for further action, initiating work on a transition plan and engaging all interested stakeholders in this work. The Agreement's participants are facing brand new challenges, have no previous experience to rely upon, and that creates a risk that their energy and zest for cooperation may quickly die down if no reliable formula for further work on the transition plan is agreed soon. In addition, the plan should contain a specific schedule of activities, set the deadline for ending coal mining and lignite energy generation and clearly define other objectives and ways to achieve them.<sup>48</sup>

To devise a transition plan, it is necessary to answer the following questions:

- ▶ What does just transition imply for the region?
- ▶ What are the priorities? Bold visions for the future or specific solutions to be applied here and now to meet the current needs of the region's residents?
- ▶ In the context of transition, what funds and from what sources should be allocated to ZE PAK and to local communities affected by the company's activities to date?
- ▶ If ZE PAK is to receive public aid to shift towards renewable energy, what environmental and employment guarantees should it offer in exchange and what arrangements for civil society oversight should be laid down in the transition plan?

**The inclusive nature of the debate on these and other issues connected with the region's transition will be of key importance for the transition's success and will be decisive for its perception as a just initiative.**

<sup>48</sup> The Coal Platform offers financial support for technical assistance in preparing transition plans. For more see <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/eu-coal-regions/secretariat-and-technical-assistance> (accessed on 30.05.2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the process of Eastern Wielkopolska's transition to date and interviews with representatives of the local organisations lead to the following conclusions:

- Eastern Wielkopolska's unfavourable socio-economic situation stems from the fact that strategic thinking about the region's future has been absent for many years, and at present the region's economic decline poses a genuine threat in connection with the planned layoffs in the mining and energy sector.
- Civil society representatives and the regional government see the need to work out a coherent long-term strategy for the region's development taking into account the socio-economic challenges and the need to phase out coal and take action to improve the environment.
- The region's economic potential lies in the development of a modern low-carbon economy based on energy derived from renewable sources.
- The "Agreement on Eastern Wielkopolska's just energy transition", signed by more than forty entities representing the public sector, the private sector and non-governmental organisations, is an important first step towards further coordinated action.
- Wielkopolska's regional government is aware of the subregion's socio-economic peculiarities and of the challenges faced by Eastern Wielkopolska, and recognises the need to offer comprehensive support to the region on its way towards transition in the form of funds from the EU budget and the national budget.
- Eastern Wielkopolska's participation in the Platform for Coal Regions in Transition in the so-called Country Team formula is a major success crowning the joint efforts of civil society and the local and regional government, which is an example of effective cooperation and pursuit of common goals.
- For the region's just transition to be possible, the state of the natural environment needs to be taken into account. The situation of local communities, residing for example in the Babiak municipality, in the vicinity of the lake district and in areas adjacent to opencast mines, clearly shows that environmental problems such as disturbed water management undermine the region's development potential and erode people's living standards.
- Successive owners of the power stations and mines have for years failed to deliver on their commitment to reclaim post-mining sites and to compensate local residents for the environmental damage, and there has been no reaction from the competent administrative bodies.
- So far, the voice of local communities residing outside of Eastern Wielkopolska's cities has not been taken into account in the process of devising plans and strategies for the region's development.
- The actual state of the natural environment and the ecosystem services lost as a result of the mines' operation have not fully been taken into account in the debates on the region's transition.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Polish Green Network recommends the following to those who will be involved in the process of Eastern Wielkopolska's just transition:

- There is an urgent need to launch consultations with all stakeholder groups in order to work out a coherent understanding of the notion of just transition and to devise the region's development strategy. It is important to devise both a long-term strategy and a short-term plan to remedy the dynamic changes on the job market. The process of devising such strategies should be inclusive and participatory.
- It is important to offer financial support, including compensation for local communities whose quality of life and livelihoods have suffered as a result of environmental degradation caused by the mining and energy sector.
- Public administration bodies should exert constant pressure on ZE PAK as regards its commitment to reclaim post-mining sites and mitigate the threats to the environment posed by its operation.
- The just transition strategy should be based on a strong commitment to abandon coal mining in the region, including a specific deadline and schedule for achieving this, and should place an emphasis on the development of climate-friendly energy and community energy.
- The economic vision of the region's future based on low-carbon and innovative solutions should be maintained and developed.
- There is an urgent need to devise plans to support employees of the fuel and energy sector who are at risk of losing their jobs, for example in the form of free retraining opportunities and job-seeking assistance.
- It is of crucial importance to obtain and properly use EU funds, including those available from the Modernisation Fund, as well as funds available at the regional and national level, to improve the quality of life of residents of the region's towns and villages and to protect the region's natural environment.
- Creation of consortiums and partnerships should be facilitated, in particular whenever these are formed by civil society organisations, in order to enable the implementation of joint projects using the support offered by the Coal Platform (including from different sources of funding such as EU funds, the Modernisation Fund, loans from the European Investment Bank, local crowd-funding initiatives).
- There is a need to organise comprehensive information and awareness-raising campaigns in the region in order to familiarise its residents with the objectives, challenges and benefits of just transition.







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