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Wind power becomes Europe's fastest growing energy source

Europe installs 20 wind turbines a day and 10 EU states reach wind power capacity of more than 1GW

David Gow in Brussels

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The UK added 836MW of wind power to reach 3.24GW in 2008. Photograph: Andrew Milligan/PAT

More wind power was installed in the EU than any other electricity-generating technology in 2008, according to data released yesterday.

The [European Wind Energy Association \(EWEA\)](#) produced figures showing wind power provided 43% of new capacity – or almost two gigawatts (GW) – compared with 35% for gas, 13% for oil, 4% for coal and 2% for hydro power.

The [EWEA's claim that wind power is the fastest growing technology in Europe](#) for the first time came as it [emerged that the US overtook Germany last year](#) – before Barack Obama entered the White House with his "green" agenda - to become the world's number one wind power installer.

The [Global Wind Energy Council \(GWEC\)](#) said China, whose capacity doubled for the fourth year in a row, was set to reach second place by 2010 – meeting its 2020 target of 30GW 10 years ahead of schedule.

EWEA's figures come at a period of heightened EU debate over the role of nuclear power, with France awarding the contract for its second EPR (the controversial European Pressurised Reactor) to state-owned EDF last week.

There is also concern over the viability of plans to generate 20% of primary energy from renewables by 2020, the future of carbon emissions trading and the security of gas supplies after the latest Russia-Ukraine dispute.

Christian Kjaer, the EWEA chief executive, said: "The figures show that wind energy is the undisputed number one choice in Europe's efforts to move towards clean, indigenous renewable power." On each average working day in Europe last year, 20 wind turbines were installed.

The new wind power capacity, costing €11bn (£9.9bn), should, in a normal year, produce 142 TWH (terawatt hours) of electricity or about 4.2% of EU demand and abate 100m tonnes of CO₂ a year – equal to taking more than 50m cars off Europe's roads.

Germany and Spain both installed more than 1.6GW while the UK added 836MW (megawatts) to reach 3.24GW. Ten of the EU's 27 states have now got wind power capacity of more than 1GW.

Global capacity grew by 27GW to reach almost 121GW by the end of 2008, prompting Steve Sawyer, the head of GWEC, to assert that wind energy was the only technology capable of delivering the necessary CO₂ cuts in the critical period up to 2020. Investments last year totalled €36.5bn.

US capacity now totals 25GW, after leaping by a half in 2008, with Germany close behind at 24GW. But the GWEC admitted that financing for new projects and orders "slowed to a trickle" in the US as the economic crisis deepened.

China, which added 6.3GW, now has 12.2GW of capacity and the country has identified wind energy as a key growth component in its economic stimulus package. Li Junfeng, the head of the Chinese Renewable Energy Industry Association, said new capacity would almost double again this year.

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