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Wind energy: the power of security, the power of Europe

The ongoing escalation in Iran and the, once again, spiralling power prices in Europe prove one thing: renewables are the only future-proof energy strategy for Europe. Wind energy is affordable and home grown. It shields Europe from geopolitical crises and fossil-fuelled price swings. It's central to the region's energy security and industrial competitiveness. WindEurope's Annual Event this year, from 21st to 23rd April in Madrid, will showcase how Europe can ramp up its security strategy with a faster build-out of wind energy.

The last few weeks have shown, yet again, how vulnerable Europe's current energy system is to geopolitical shocks. Natural gas prices in Europe quickly rose by more than 40% after the escalation in the Middle East on 28th February, reaching their highest levels since 2023.

At the time of writing, experts still struggle to predict future gas prices in Europe or whether it will have enough gas to get through the next winter. Their hardly reassuring conclusion, 'we should be fine, if the war does not last long.' Meanwhile, EU leaders are hastily planning new crisis meetings.

This new energy crisis lays the truth bare: Europe is simply too exposed to volatile fossil fuel imports. It spends €500bn a year on importing energy, most of it fossil fuels. Rising oil prices mean that Europe has spent a further €6bn on fossil imports in the three weeks since the start of the Iran conflict.

Europe needs to beat its fossil fuel addiction. Oil and gas are a dent in its energy security and industrial competitiveness.

Instead, Europe must focus on its own strengths. Home grown wind energy reduces its overdependence on fossil imports and exposure to external shocks. Wind supplies

20% of the electricity consumed in Europe today. It reduces fossil fuel imports by 100 billion cubic metres each year, the equivalent of 500 large oil tankers.

The economic case for wind energy

The economic case for wind energy is strong. The European wind sector contributes €52 billion to Europe's GDP and supports 440,000 jobs across more than 250 factories. New research shows that this job figure is expected to grow to more than 600,000 over the next five years.

Wind energy is one of the most competitive forms of power produced in Europe. Both onshore and offshore wind farms generate power much more cheaply than new fossil or nuclear power plants.

The benefits to consumers are just as clear: between 2021 and 2023, new wind and solar installations cut electricity bills by €100bn.

The benefits of wind and solar are even more obvious when you consider the long-term perspective. Hitachi Energy has mapped out the total system costs of five energy scenarios. Four of these scenarios deliver net zero, while the final one is a 'slow transition' scenario, where Europe does not meet its climate targets.

The result: an energy system based on renewables is €1.6 trillion less expensive than a system where Europe fails to deliver on net zero. These savings are equivalent to what Europe collectively spends on healthcare each year. Or 9% of the European Union's GDP. These are not long-term savings: already by 2035, the renewables scenario would save Europe €331bn compared to the slow transition scenario.

Notably, the renewables-based system also saves Europe billions compared to alternative energy systems, with high shares of nuclear power, hydrogen or natural gas in combination with CCS. And it's true even when you account for the full system costs, power grids, storage and flexibility. Looking at the findings now, the outbreak of the Iran War and the global price surges for fossil fuels only widen the gap between the renewable-based system and its alternatives.

Why we are not building enough new wind

Despite all this, Europe is not building new farms as fast as it could be. Last year it installed 19 GW of new capacity. That's not nearly enough to deliver on the EU's energy security and climate targets.

The leading bottleneck to a faster expansion of wind energy today is Europe's weak electricity grid network. Grid infrastructure is not keeping pace with renewable expansion. Europe needs to expand its grid lines and optimise existing connections. But permitting processes for new connections are still slow and cumbersome.

And then there are grid connection issues. Hundreds of GW of wind projects are stuck in grid connection queues across Europe right now. Not all of them are mature projects. But take Spain, where 11 GW of mature projects are stuck in grid connection queues. These projects will come online the moment that these grid bottlenecks are addressed, helping to tackle Europe's current energy security challenges.

The EU has put forward a Grids Package with helpful measures. Member States now need to implement these measures with the greatest urgency.

Permitting remains a second key bottleneck to the expansion of wind energy. Numbers from Germany are overshadowing the real state of wind energy permitting in Europe today. Germany rigorously implemented the EU's Emergency Rules during the 2022 energy crisis, fast-tracking permitting procedures and applying the notion of 'overriding public interest' for renewable energy projects. The impressive result: Germany permitted more than 20 GW of new wind energy projects in 2025 alone, creating a sizeable project pipeline.

But beyond that, permitting in Europe has barely improved. In fact, it has got worse in many Member States. EU countries are still



taking five years on average to approve new wind projects, creating uncertainty for developers, weakening investor confidence and raising costs. This needs to stop.

The EU's Renewable Energy Directive has put all the solutions to fast-tracking permitting on the table. Member States must not drag their feet any longer in implementing these measures.

A third reason for the slow build-out of wind is the stagnating electrification of Europe's economy. Electricity accounts for only about a quarter of Europe's total energy use. China is powering ahead, electrifying large portions of its transport, heating and industry. This is giving China a competitive edge.

Industrial electrification, in particular, has run into delays, and too many industrial processes still depend on fossil fuels. This has broader consequences. With the Iran conflict ongoing, this means that Europe's industry is highly exposed to supply chain disruptions.

We could have progressed a lot further already. Many industrial heat applications and production processes can be electrified with well-established technologies like industrial heat pumps. Reducing taxes and levies on electricity, improving access to long-term renewable PPAs and stabilising regulatory frameworks would all make electrification far more attractive.

Europe must allow industrial consumers to tap into more competitive renewable power generation. Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) can already provide this. But the European Investment Bank must play a bigger role here. Its current €500m guarantees for PPAs are simply too small to meet the challenge right now.

The EU Commission must put forward an Electrification Action Plan to give Member States a more concrete steer on how to support the uptake of electrification. Lastly, Europe must allow targeted state aid for companies that want to switch from fossil fuels to renewable electricity.

The WindEurope Annual Event 2026 in Madrid

From 21st to 23rd April, Madrid will host the WindEurope Annual Event 2026, bringing together policymakers, industry and other stakeholders to discuss these very urgent topics. Considering the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, the event will highlight wind energy's crucial role for energy security and strategic independence.

Madrid will become a focal point for Europe's broader energy debate. The questions addressed there reflect broader challenges felt across the continent: the need to boost energy security; to accelerate electrification; to reform permitting and grid access; and to ensure that Europe's wind industry remains competitive in the face of global competition.

Spain is Europe's second largest wind market, with 33 GW of wind energy capacity, all of it onshore. Spain is now also aiming to kickstart its own offshore wind industry, with the first offshore wind auctions expected in 2026. Wind already plays a major role in Spain's electricity mix. It covers a quarter of all electricity consumed and contributes to its industrial ecosystem through manufacturing, engineering and logistics.

Despite persistent permitting and grid connection challenges, Spain's wind sector is still well positioned for future growth. Combined wind-solar-battery projects, repowering and offshore wind offer new opportunities for the country's strong industrial base.

Europe is facing a new energy crisis. The developments in the Middle East and their implications on Europe are extremely dynamic and hard to predict. But one fact remains: home-grown wind energy will make Europe a more resilient and safer continent, better prepared for any future global turmoil.

This crisis is not a one-off. It's the new normal. Europe must double down on what works and tackle what slows down the transition to renewables. Europe's wind industry is here to support these efforts. Wind energy, the energy of security, the energy of Europe.

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