

Wind power in Europe grows, but credit remains tight

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For the second year in a row, more wind power capacity was installed in the European Union than any other power technology, according to data compiled by the European Wind Energy Association.

The association reported that 39 percent of all new capacity installed last year was wind power. Runners-up were natural gas, which accounted for 26 percent of new capacity, and solar photovoltaics, which accounted for 16 percent.

A total of 10,163 megawatts of wind power was installed in 2009 — up 23 percent from 2008 — bringing the European Union total to 74,767 megawatts of wind power. (Germany remains the European Union country with the largest installed capacity.)

Wind power accounts for 9 percent of total installed power capacity in the European Union, up from 2 percent in 2000, according to the association.

“It is a remarkable result in a difficult year” said Christian Kjaer, the chief executive of the association, in a press statement. “The figures, once again, confirm that wind power, together with other renewable energy technologies and a shift from coal to gas, are delivering massive European carbon reductions, while creating much needed economic activity and new jobs for Europe’s citizens.”

Still, the global credit crunch has hit the wind industry hard, making it difficult for customers of turbine manufacturers to continue financing projects throughout Europe. There is no clear evidence that this will change in the near future, Mr. Kjaer suggested.

“I am quite optimistic about the medium-term outlook for wind power in Europe, but project finance is still tight, and it is clear that more orders must be announced in the coming months for the sector to repeat the 10 gigawatts installed this year,” Mr. Kjaer said.

Since 2008, renewable energy sources have accounted for more than 50 percent of new power installations in the European Union. The majority of that has been wind power, but solar power, biomass and hydro-power have also increased.

The result is that renewable energy has increased from 14 percent of new installations in 1995 to 61 percent in 2009.

Meanwhile, coal and nuclear power have been on the decline. According to the wind association’s report, the coal power sector decommissioned some 3,200 megawatts of capacity in 2009, while the nuclear power cut 1,393 megawatts.

Fonte: New York Times, New York, Feb. 3rd 2010, Energy & Environment, online.