

Statement

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Wind Energy: Stimulus for Long-Term Growth



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"Having enjoyed annual growth rates of up to 30 percent in the recent boom years, wind energy is making somewhat slower progress in 2009. However, all the signs are already pointing to a return to two figure growth rates within the next two years.

When we look back on 2008, we can see that wind energy has succeeded in making an international breakthrough, with the newly installed capacity of 28,000 MW equally distributed across the US, Asian and European markets. International wind energy capacity has thus grown by a quarter, to a total of 120 GW. This equates to the power output of 120 nuclear power stations. In terms of new wind energy plants, the USA led the way in 2008 and now holds the largest wind power capacity in the world — ahead of Germany, Spain and China.

Yet it is the great significance of the American market that has led to this current period of reduced growth. The credit crisis has had a major impact on the financing of planned wind parks. Moreover, the phenomenal growth in wind energy necessitates the urgent restructuring and modernization of the American power network. Both of these problems are tackled by the Obama administration's stimulus bill: With this package of measures, comprising sureties and tax models, the government intends to trigger a financing budget of up to USD 60 billion for the expansion of renewable energies and modernization of the power network. And there is an important prerequisite for potential beneficiaries to gain access to these funds: Construction of the projects must begin by September 3, 2011 at the latest. While this massive cash injection will only begin to bear fruit in a few months time, the results will be all the more significant.

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In 2008, the installed capacity in China was doubled for the fourth year in a row. Unlike in the USA, the market continues to grow strongly in 2009. The Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC) predicts that China will erect the greatest number of new wind plants this year.

Europe boasts more than half of the entire global capacity, but in the pioneering markets of Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark growth has slowed in recent years. The limited number of potential sites in these countries is one important reason for this. However, the pledge from the European Union to increase the share of renewable energies to 20 percent of total power consumption by 2020 necessitates further expansion of wind energy capacity. As a result, the concept of repowering on-shore plants is gaining ever greater significance. Germany alone possesses some 3000 first generation wind energy plants. With a power output of less than 400 kW, they offer just a fraction of the 3000 to 6000 kW generated by modern systems. As examples of repowering in Denmark and the Netherlands have shown, the replacement of older plants with new multi-megawatt systems can greatly increase the installed capacity at established sites.

A second growth driver in Europe, offshore wind parks, is also gaining momentum. The industry has developed a new generation of wind energy plants specifically for use on the high seas, and this is now ready for series production. Rexroth is contributing highly reliable gearbox technology for wind energy plants as well as automation solutions. Just one major development is the state-of-the-art Rexroth software, which monitors the condition of the rotor blades and warns the control unit in the case of icing. These condition monitoring systems issue warnings before wear or damage can occur. This allows operators to better plan their maintenance measures, which will significantly increase the availability of the wind energy plants."

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