

European summit to spur wind energy production in North Sea

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As the North Sea is relatively shallow, turbines can be installed fairly easily and in great number.

Nine European countries were holding a summit Monday aimed at scaling up wind power generation in the North Sea, spurred by the

fallout of the Ukraine war and the push for renewables.

Hosted by Belgium in the coastal town of Ostend, the meeting will gather the leaders of EU members France, Germany, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, with European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen also attending.

Norway and Britain will participate, too, though French officials said the UK's energy minister would lead the delegation and not Prime Minister Rishi Sunak who could not make it.

"We need [offshore wind turbines](#)—and we need a lot of them," the leaders of the countries said in a joint op-ed published in Politico.

"We need them to reach our [climate goals](#), and to rid ourselves of Russian gas, ensuring a more secure and independent Europe."

The collective goal, they said, was to boost offshore [wind power generation](#) to 120 gigawatts by 2030—from just 30 GW now—and at least 300 GW by 2050.

The North Sea summit is the second one to be held, after the four countries in the inaugural gathering last year—Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands—decided it was necessary to broaden cooperation.

They recognised this was "a massive undertaking" requiring "huge investments in infrastructure".

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said ahead of the summit that it would be focused on "speed of execution", notably the standardisation of equipment needed to build the offshore [wind](#) farms faster and cheaper.

Around 100 bosses of companies in the wind turbine supply chain were also participating in the summit.

The leaders' op-ed, whose signatories included French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, emphasised the need to source expertise and parts from Europe rather than elsewhere.

"We need to make space for European value chains when it comes to green tech and diversify our sources of critical raw materials for [wind turbines](#), batteries and the like," they said.

China currently holds a dominating position in the supply of critical components such as rare earths.

Industry criticism

WindEurope, the federation representing Europe's wind energy industry, believes the ambitions of the Ostend summit are doable, given the technological expertise and experience of companies in the sector.

But it highlighted a lack of "adequate funding mechanisms" and recruitment in the sector.

Current policy, aimed at getting to a carbon-neutral future in Europe, "is overly focused on technological breakthroughs, rather than actual scaling up of existing supply chains", WindEurope said in a statement.

It also criticised "uncoordinated market interventions, price caps and national clawback measures" that "deterred investments".

The organisation says Europe needs to build the offshore infrastructure to add 20 GW in output per year, yet the sector currently has capacity for just seven GW annually, with supply chain bottlenecks for cables,

substations and foundations, and in the availability of offshore wind vessels.

Investment to get Europe where it wants to be is massive: the EU has calculated the cost of getting to 300 GW in offshore energy production by 2050 at 800 billion euros (\$900 billion).

Britain has the biggest fleet of [offshore wind farms](#), 45 of them producing 14 GW, with plans to expand capacity to 50 GW by 2030.

Germany is next, with 30 wind farms producing 8 GW, followed by the Netherlands with 2.8 GW and Denmark and Belgium both with 2.3 GW.

The other participating countries produce less than a gigawatt from their existing installations but share ambitions to greatly increase energy from that source.

The European Union recently set a goal to double the proportion of renewables in its energy mix, to 42.5 percent, notably by making it easier to get permits to install the infrastructure.

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