

The US should follow Europe's lead

Look at what Europe doing now, to address its energy, economic and employment woes

Paul Driessen

President Obama and environmentalists often say America should follow Europe's lead on energy, climate and economic matters.

Recent events suggest that we should listen more attentively to the Europeans.

Two brutal winters have awakened Europe to the fact that global temperatures stopped rising in 1998 – and that frigid days and nights pose far graver dangers to the elderly and poor than warm weather and moderate global warming.

Germany and the Netherlands were gripped by near-record lows this past winter. People suffered frostbite and some froze to death in Poland and Russia.

Barely twelve months after its Meteorological Office said the 2009-10 winter was the coldest in three decades, Britain endured its coldest December-January since 1683. Because the United Kingdom's ultra green energy policies have driven heating costs into the stratosphere, British pensioners rode buses or spent all day in libraries to stay warm, then shivered all night in their apartments. Tens of thousands risked hypothermia, trying to control costs by bundling up and turning the heat down or off. Many died.

In Wales, a third of all children live in low-income households, and a quarter of all households were in "fuel poverty" – forced to spend at least 10% of their income on heating. Many parents had to choose between keeping their children warm and providing them with nourishing meals, welfare workers said. Many Welsh children couldn't sleep at night because of the cold, damaging their health and grades.

This isn't proof that the world is entering a global cooling cycle. But the absence of sunspots is the most prolonged in a century, and scientists say the reduced solar activity is reminiscent of the Maunder Minimum, between 1645 and 1715, when the Northern Hemisphere suffered through the coldest weather, worst storms and shortest growing seasons of the Little Ice Age.

The frigid weather, freezing families, record budget deficits, soaring unemployment – and complete failure of global warming computer models to predict anything other than "a warmer than normal winter" – have caused a meltdown in Europe's longstanding climate and energy policies.

In fact, many Europeans increasingly recognize that businesses, hospitals and especially poor families absolutely need reliable, affordable energy – which wind and solar cannot provide.

United Kingdom manufacturers say "green energy" policies and increased penalties for using fossil fuels are raising their costs to intolerable levels, especially for energy-intensive industries. Manufacturing is "reaching a tipping point," they say, "where companies that are internationally mobile will say 'enough is enough,'" and simply move to Asia. Millions of jobs are on the line.

"If we go alone to 30% [renewable energy]," European Energy Commissioner Gunter Oettinger emphasized, "you will have a faster process of de-industrialization in Europe. We need industry, and industry means CO2 emissions." Tougher climate and renewable targets will force industries to move to Asia, he added, and steel will likely be one of the first casualties. Europe can no longer afford to "prop up" renewable energy industries. Many countries are listening.

The British government is looking into cutting subsidies, feed-in tariffs and other incentives for solar projects, to prevent the boom-and-bust seen in Spain and predicted for the Czech Republic. Wind turbines, small hydroelectric plants and biomass projects are also on the block, as the government attempts to revive the UK economy, raise its competitiveness, radically reduce rising debt burdens, and chart a more economically and politically realistic course.

The Netherlands reduced its renewable energy targets and slashed wind subsidies by 60% (\$3.5 billion). More shocking, even in the wake of Fukushima, the Dutch are talking of approving their first new nuclear power plant in 40 years, because they can no longer afford to pay exorbitant fees for minimal amounts of renewable electricity (that is well below theoretically “rated” or “capacity” output).

Poland is racing to develop shale gas, using hydraulic fracturing methods developed by American companies to unlock trillions of cubic feet of methane for its homes and factories. Exploratory drilling is also underway, or about to begin, in Britain, Germany and other countries, as engineers evaluate the extent and economics of developing their own vast shale gas deposits.

In Slovakia, the government stopped issuing solar licenses barely six months after launching its program. After unaffordable subsidies were sharply reduced, new solar installations in the Czech Republic fell 76% (from 2800 MW in 2009 to 400 MW in 2010); in Spain they plummeted 98% (from 2800 MW to 69 MW between 2008 and 2009). Private investments in these government-supported programs also cratered.

France and other countries are taking similar steps, while also expanding coal-based electricity, to replace nuclear. “Austerity-whacked Europe is rolling back subsidies for renewable energy, as economic sanity makes a tentative comeback,” London *Globe and Mail* columnist Eric Reguly observed. “Green energy is becoming unaffordable and may cost as many jobs as it creates.” Or worse.

A new report from Scotland found that renewable energy kills 3.7 traditional jobs for every “green” job it creates. Wind power mandates also cost British energy consumers an extra \$1.8 billion in higher electricity costs in 2009-2010. Rebellion is in the air, and belief in dangerous manmade global warming has plummeted.

Europe also drills for oil, onshore and off its coasts, especially in the North Sea.

However, despite these changes in the Europe he extols so often, President Obama says this is America’s “Sputnik moment.” He wants the United States to “invest” in “the Apollo projects of our time” – spending countless billions of additional taxpayer dollars to “stimulate” pricey renewable energy, high-speed rail, climate change “prevention” and other projects. His April 13 budget speech reiterated this commitment.

This is precisely the kind of government-as-usual our nation can no longer afford: politicians and bureaucrats deciding which energy technologies, industries and companies win – and which ones lose – on the basis of politics, rather than science, economics, technology or common sense.

It is time to follow Europe’s lead. We may not be able to do anything about the weather or climate. But we can, and must, implement policies that ensure we have the technology, money, jobs and energy to adapt to whatever climate and weather changes might come.

Developing America’s vast domestic oil, natural gas, coal, shale gas and uranium deposits will generate millions of jobs and hundreds of billions of dollars in critically needed royalty and tax revenue. We must ensure that our energy policies generate revenues and create jobs – instead of requiring constant taxpayer subsidies and destroying two to four traditional jobs for every “green” job that government “creates.”

We need to do that, and can do it without hurting the environmental values we all cherish.

Any policies that shackle our ability to follow this new Europe-advised course will severely harm our nation’s future – and shackle blue-collar jobs, poor families and minority opportunities worst of all.

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