


# Carolina country

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Your co-op's board of directors authorizes a subscription to Carolina Country on behalf of the membership at a cost of less than \$4 per year.



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## Across The Pond: a European energy policy perspective



By Robert K. Koger

There's nothing like seeing another part of the world to lend perspective to how we're doing here in North Carolina.

In November, I was among 26 North Carolinians who visited Europe on a mission to see how the European Union is handling energy and environmental challenges. We represented the energy industry, environmental organizations, state government and philanthropies. The privately-funded trip was arranged by the Center for International Understanding, a 32-year-old institution affiliated with the University of North Carolina system that helps educate and prepare state leaders for global opportunities.

We focused on energy-related policies and systems in Belgium, France and Germany—nations in the forefront of energy planning among European Union countries.

As you might guess, the 27 EU nations each follow their own cultural paths, much like the U.S. states do, while advancing the EU as a whole. European policy goals differ from ours, but it is clear that to meet all our energy and environmental requirements in the decades to come, we all must carefully balance our natural resources to provide us with reliable sources of energy. There is not just one, or even two best ways to develop our energy resources. We need to develop them all. And the bright side is that the whole process can be very good for our economy. The emerging energy future includes good jobs for our citizens.

Europe's energy situation also differs from ours. Electricity rates on average are twice what we pay. (In Denmark, rates are about 36 cents per kilowatt-hour.) Gasoline costs about \$8 per gallon. Europeans are prudent about energy use because they have to be. They use about half the electricity we use, mainly because they don't use as much electricity for heating, and air-conditioning is nowhere near as prevalent as it is here.


But like North Carolina, European nations will need more energy to meet demand in the very near future, and more

infrastructure for delivering that power.

How are they going about it? Like North Carolina, European nations have mandated a shift to renewable energy sources. For one thing, the requirements give us a focus, a goal to meet. Their goals are more ambitious than ours. The EU by 2020 wants 20 percent of its energy to come from renewable sources: wind, solar, biomass and others. By 2020, they want to see greenhouse gas emissions measure 20 percent below 1990 levels and to improve energy efficiency by 20 percent.

What drives European policy, however, is exactly what drives ours: energy security, the changing climate, and moving to a clean-energy economy. Similar to our risky dependence on foreign fuels, Europe is weaning itself from a risky dependence on Russian natural gas.

Seeing some of their facilities really opened our eyes and our minds. In parts of Germany, we saw colossal wind turbines turning 165-foot blades that each weigh 10 tons. One region of what used to be East Germany acquires half its electricity from renewable sources, mostly wind. France, on the other hand, is a world leader in clean nuclear energy, with some 58 plants supplying electricity to much of Europe. Electric rates in France as a result are the lowest on the continent. As much as 40 percent of spent nuclear fuel is reprocessed safely and re-used.

We came home convinced that the U.S. needs a comprehensive energy policy, a balanced development of our natural resources and technology (clean coal, nuclear, renewable), and consistent, fair regulations within both government and private business that allow us to plan effectively for the future. 

*Dr. Robert K. Koger, P.E., is president and executive director of Advanced Energy, a Raleigh-based, non-profit that focuses on energy efficiency for commercial and industrial markets, electric motors and drives, plug-in transportation and applied building science. North Carolina Electric Membership Corporation is a member.*