

Report of North Sea Greens meeting at the Geneva Congress, October 13th 2006

Present were representatives from England / Wales, Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, Norway. Over half the participants had not been to a North Sea Greens meeting before.

1. Reports from parties

Norway – had elections last year, but were not very successful; local elections next year.

Denmark – Also had elections last year. The welfare state is an important issue, and environmental policies are still rising up the agenda, with the aim of producing 50% of Denmark's energy from renewable sources, although the Greens say it should be 99%.

Sweden – Had a general election on September 17th in which the Greens increased their share of the vote from 4.6% to 5.2% and now have 19 seats in parliament out of 349, but no longer have a place in the government. The Greens are the third largest party on Stockholm city council.

Belgium (Groen!) – achieved 12% of the vote after the dioxin crisis in 1999, but after four years lost all 12 of their MPs, although subsequently some members were elected to regional parliaments. There were local elections last weekend, and they held their 2004 percentage, around 7.5%. Groen! hope to be re-elected to the federal parliament next year. Currently the government is being influenced by the right wing and environmental policies are not the priority they were.

Sweden – had a referendum on Stockholm's congestion charge, which had had a seven month trial; polls had shown that people were very positive about it. However, the overall result of the referendum was negative, although positive in Stockholm. The issue will be placed before the Swedish parliament for a final decision. However, a current compromise is that money raised from the congestion charge would be used for building more roads, mainly a ring road round Stockholm.

England / Wales – Greens had a relatively successful time in May's local elections, although not quite reaching their target of 100 local councillors. In London the number of local councillors went up from 1 to 12, including six in the borough of Lewisham.

2. Next meeting of the North Sea Greens

This is the proposal that was sent to the committee for inclusion in their budget round – “One meeting next year, in Copenhagen, in the Spring (date to be decided) - main theme of the meeting will be the problems caused by ballast water (Ballast water - problems and possible solutions). This is of growing concern in a number of countries and attempts to address the problem should prove fruitful in electoral terms.”

Other suggestions regarding the meeting were that it could be run jointly with the Baltic Greens, that nuclear / sustainable energy be the main topic, and that consideration be given to holding it in the Autumn; also that if energy were the topic then this would tie in with the EGP energy /climate campaign.

Concern was also raised about the lack of involvement of Groenlinks and Bündnis90 / die Grünen; there were suggestions that we should approach Greens in and around Hamburg.

3. Meetings other than face-to-face

The point was made that for teleconferencing we would definitely need a specific point to discuss. Although an international teleconference would probably prove expensive, if we used Skype then the cost would be much less.

We would definitely need information that could best come from within the expertise of the Green Group, but that would depend on their workload and if it were on the agenda of the Parliament.

It was suggested that we try a conference call before the next council meeting and evaluate its worth at our meeting at that council meeting – NB the next council meeting is planned for March 17/18 in Berlin but that is the weekend of the Finnish elections and the EGP committee are going to examine whether the date can be brought forward by a week, or possibly by two weeks.

There was support for the suggestion that we could get involved in the SEAPORT project, which concerns 12 states around the North Sea and the export of EU waste to third countries; Holland is taking the lead in this and Antwerp is one of the main harbours used.

4. Funding of the group

It was (again) noted that EGP funding was being diverted to issue based working groups with the specific aim of seeing more MEPs elected in 2009.

Charles Berkow (Sweden) asked how we could make better use of the resources available, such as the elected MEPs and the Green Group staff; he offered to talk to Johan Hamels (EGP treasurer) and Reinhard Butikofer (German Greens) about this as it could help if we wanted to do some work on the seaports project.

5. New co-ordinator

We agreed that Nikki MacLeod of the Scottish Greens should be the new co-ordinator of the group. As a significant number of those present were new to the group Nikki is asked to send a short introduction to the email list.

6. Brief notes from the Baltic Greens meeting

There was a review of the Oil or Fish conference held recently – just four countries were represented; Sweden, Finland, Poland and Denmark. One of the Finnish Greens is keen on building a new website for the Baltic Greens. They are moving towards creating a new email list as there are problems with adding new people to the current one. There was also notice of a conference in Hamburg in May entitled Creative Cities, which is being organised by the Hamburg Greens and the Baltic Greens may hold a meeting to coincide with this.

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