

EGP Council meeting – Reinhard Bütikofer
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What role for Greens at a time when everybody is talking about energy and climate change ?

Good morning dear friends,

The topic I'm supposed to talk about has been called "What role for Greens at a time when everybody is talking about energy and climate change". Well, I believe the question what role Greens should play is easily answered, but it is by far not easy to implement the obvious.

The role of us Greens who have advanced progressive energy and climate policy when few would listen, our role is to make the practical difference. For a while all chattering politicians and journalists and so on find it interesting to discover a topic which they have ignored all too long. So everybody now talks the talk, but who walks the walk? That has to be us Greens.

We have to forge new alliances to make things really happen. We have to take on the big climate killers like the dominating energy utilities. We have to slug it out with the auto industry over the direction in which they have to develop to save the climate and to stay in business with more climate friendly products. We have to be the political party that understands how to translate the present public and media discussion into a broadly based civic movement of environmental reform. The difference between the nice words about the global responsibility for the global climate and the lame we will frequently find when action is demanded, this difference is what we Greens do not accept. The present public discussion about global warming and its consequences certainly is the most important, the most far-reaching, the most broadly shared and the most promising environmental discussion that we've ever seen in Europe, definitely the most exciting one in a whole political generation.

For whatever it brings, it's going to be a defining moment for the environmentalists and for us Greens. Environmentalists will recall the very emotional time after the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986. In that discussion, twenty years ago, not as many countries were as deeply involved. That discussion didn't influence the political mainstream as much. But for the then still nascent Green movement it proved to be an extremely important experience. As the anti-nuclear party we managed to win majority support for that topic among the general public in several countries. That marked a new role for the Greens in these countries from an avant-garde party that had been considered as being on the fringes we became an avant-garde party with the perspective of really leading a majority if we could find a social and political coalition able to translate that majority into legislative action.

Today the challenge as well as the promise is even greater. While the decision about going nuclear or not or initiating a nuclear phase-out could still be fought and won on a national level the climate issue is so obviously an international one that it would be ridiculous to try to approach it on a strictly national or even regional level.

Europe is the indispensable actor that we have to shape if we really want to have an impact on the way the whole world will tackle this overridingly important issue. We have said this often times: we Greens need Europe to achieve our goals, and Europe needs us Greens to understand and to implement its mission. This is certainly even more true with regard to climate change than in any other political field. Therefore we have to define our strategies for countering climate change on the European level to start with. It is therefore more than fitting and very timely that we have chosen the climate issue as the main topic for this council meeting of the EGP.

The climate issue has been challenging us for a long time. Back in 2001 in Canberra at the Global Greens gathering we discussed global warming as an apt issue for internationally coordinated Green activities. The first common topical campaign that the European Greens organized was on Climate Change and I do hope we will be able to make the same issue the core of the common electoral campaign for the European elections in 2009.

There are, I believe, three conditions which are particularly favourable to a common effort in this direction.

First, more than two thirds of European citizens are looking to Europe with high expectations when it comes to energy and climate policy. They want Europe to act and to lead.

Secondly, we Greens have a particularly high competency on this issue. A poll that was published recently in Germany showed that among average citizens 52% trusted the Greens on climate policy. The conservatives came in a distant second with just 8%. I trust results would be similarly favourable in other countries too.

Thirdly, the EU Commission and the European Parliament have, on several occasions, been positive driving forces when national governments bound in loyalty to mighty lobbies or unquestionable traditions would block environmental progress.

The EGP committee has proposed setting up a working group on the climate issue and we just voted on that. This is a good initiative. Maybe we can expand on that and also ask the EGP to coordinate, together with the member parties high level climate events in several countries over the next year. Maybe we could combine national efforts to create a European clean climate website with access

in several languages. Maybe we could agree to make climate change a regular topic at EGP council meetings.

Definitely we can do much better than we have so far in binding together the work of our European and national and regional parliamentarians. They are doing great work on the climate issue everywhere. To intensely learn from each other to exchange best practice experience, that will obviously strengthen all of us.

As we know the European council has agreed climate goals. They are not the most ambitious ones. The decisive question however will be how these goals, even though several of them are not really going as far as they would have to, are going to be translated into national goals, national obligations and national actions. And there the fight has just begun. The climate decisions of the EU summit just a couple of days ago is just the starting call for a new political struggle over what is going to happen and I agree completely with what Joschka Fischer said yesterday night; it might well happen if nobody steps up, steps to the front and really puts pressure on the institutions and on all the players that are in the play here, that in the end of this goal that has been accepted with some fanfare here and some criticism there, very little would remain, which would be obviously a big political setback. Without concerted pressure from Greens and environmentalists chances are not much will be achieved at all.

European failure however would doom every serious effort on a global level. There is extremely much at stake. The next year will be decisive. Let's therefore make climate policy the focus of our Green European activities in the next year. And let's develop our own coherent proposals for the implementation of the necessary goals. It's clear what standard we have to meet in order to have a chance to achieve the +2 degree centigrade limit that, as science tells us, is the maximum that we can allow before climate change becomes a catastrophe. We in Europe have to reduce our CO2 emissions by at least 30% by the year 2020, and by 60 to 80% by the year 2050.

Of course every European effort has to have a solid political base at home in the individual member countries. And I'm not going to discuss that now in detail but I want to make four remarks with regard to that.

The necessary base at home is not only organizational. It's also a question of the values on the basis of which we develop this policy. I strongly believe that environmental activity that does not show social sensibility is not going to be successful. Therefore environmental justice is a very important issue in all of our efforts.

Secondly, those who do remember the beginning of environmental movements in Europe will recall that at the time many of the activists had this feeling that, not only our political action but our own every day behaviour, what we do and how we act in our daily lives does have a very important impact on the future of the world. Now I believe this sort of feeling has come back but not as a separate

culture on the fringes of the society or within a small avant-garde but this is hitting home, this understanding is now hitting home with a broader basis in our societies. This gives us a very good opportunity to forge new coalitions, to find new allies, to convince people that have formerly not even thought about doing common action with the Greens.

Thirdly, it's important to really involve every citizen, to convince every citizen that their own actions should contribute to the solution that we have to find. To give a practical example; whether you do use the old light bulbs or use a better technology, this on average makes a difference of 150 kg of CO₂ per year and household. That's quite an amount. But still the decisive, the more important question is whether we can force industry and business and government to create the framework within which climate friendly life styles are possible for everyone.

My fourth remark. We in the German Greens have decided to use the slogan "Klimaschutz für Alle" Climate protection for everyone, for all of us. This means we challenge all, we include all and we want to benefit all through our climate policy. This has become an issue that is a majority issue and the Greens that have fought for this, when it still was not accepted by everybody, when it still was ignored by many mainstream politicians, have to adapt to this new situation. We have to be able to lead this charge under the condition that it has become a majority issue. This means we have to open up as Greens, we have to listen to those we want to convince and we have to find new ways to include people to make this possible majority a real majority. And as much as we have been able to translate the deep anxieties in the latter half of the eighties into a majority support for an anti nuclear policy in Europe, as much, I am convinced, can we be able to translate the present discussion into a majority support for real action if we really focus.

So, dear friends, I believe we have a great chance on our hands; we have even a greater responsibility. I don't see anyone who can do it if not us. And we can't wait, we have to start now.

Thank you.