



EEB Annual Conference 2013

“ECONOMIC CRISIS, ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITY: THE PATH TO A GREENER EUROPE”

Brussels, 18 October 2013

The EEB’s Annual Conference will this year focus on the interface between economy and environment. With the economic crisis that began more than five years ago having turned out to be more than a temporary blip, there is an opportunity and indeed an obligation for Europe to look for long term solutions – solutions that respect environmental and social imperatives – so that any recovery is genuine and sustainable and does not exacerbate environmental problems, rather the opposite.

Europe’s over-use of resources is a fundamental part of the problem – not least because of the growing financial costs and security implications of our heavy dependence on imported resources – and therefore finding tools that will enable us to achieve substantial reductions in resource use is central to any solution.

As the countdown to a new global agreement on climate change proceeds, Europe’s domestic policies on energy and climate need to be put under the spotlight and revised before 2015 by putting in place ambitious new targets to save energy, reduce emissions and boost renewables.

Leveraging private finance to bring about the transition to sustainability and creating a supportive and just fiscal regime are other crucial elements.

Last but not least, there are governance challenges, for example, making sure that environmental corners are not cut as a result of pressure to deliver short-lived unsustainable economic gains and that the rights of Europeans to shape the future society are genuinely respected in this European Year of Citizens. In this respect the recently started negotiations between the EU and the US on trade and investments, that foresee the establishment of an investor state dispute settlement mechanism making EU governments liable to expensive lawsuits for passing regulations to protect public interests, are of particular importance.

Taking place in the run-up to next year’s European Parliament elections and at a time when environmental sustainability issues are often eclipsed by short-term economic considerations, the conference will bring together key stakeholders from environmental and other fields put down some markers for present and future European policymakers.

OUTLINE PROGRAMME

8.00 – 9.00 Registration

9.15 Opening session

9.30 Module 1: How to accelerate the green transition in a resource-challenged continent

Reducing our use of resources is a crucial element in the transition to a greener economy. Europe is not rich in natural resources and without a significant shift in policy, as EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy noted in a recent speech, it could eventually be the only continent to depend on imported energy as already by 2035 our dependence on oil and gas imports will exceed 80%. Improving resource efficiency is an important part of the solution but may not be sufficient if absolute use of resources continues at levels which are unsustainable. On the other hand, many of the very measures which can help to reduce our resource consumption are those which can boost the economy through creating green jobs. Environmental regulations and directives that have been put in place in the past four decades have been among the main drivers of innovation, clean technologies and new jobs and have shown successes in addressing Europe's environmental problems. The Commission's high-level European Resource Efficiency Platform has generated a number of ideas on how to move forward and these are expected to be taken up in a set of proposals from the Commission during the first half of 2014.

This module will address the following questions:

- *Will Europe be able to continue the success of past environmental policies?*
- *Is Europe's competitiveness in the global marketplace threatened more by robust policies to reduce resource consumption or by their absence?*
- *What are the big ideas that will ensure Europe's global leadership in creating a resource-efficient society for future generations?*
- *How do we join the dots between the need to live within our ecological footprint and today's economic and social reality?*
- *Has the alliance between 'green' and 'jobs' been fulfilling its potential in the debate on technological innovation?*

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee break

11.30 Module 2: Promoting EU energy policies that respect climate science

Accumulating evidence – melting Arctic sea ice, rising average global temperatures, CO₂ levels that are unprecedented in recent millennia – suggests that global warming is not something for the distant future but is well under way. The physical science component of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report, due out in September 2013, will bring this evidence together and provide a backdrop to negotiations towards adoption of a global agreement at UNFCCC CoP-21 in Paris in 2015. Important international milestones towards that goal will be CoP-19 in Warsaw and the summit meeting being convened in September 2014 by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon at which States will be invited to make pledges so that there is time to

close the expected gap between the pledges and the science-based requirements. The EU's role will be crucial to securing a successful outcome in 2015. It must continue to show leadership among developed nations, not only by developing strategic alliances to promote progressive positions in the negotiations but also by adopting, well before 2015, an ambitious 2030 framework for energy and climate policies to establish credibility in the global negotiations. Energy policy is not the only policy to influence climate but it is among the most important. Whether in relation to renewable energy or energy saving, getting our energy policies right sooner rather than later will help Europe to avoid getting further locked in to soon-to-be-obsolete technologies and being at a competitive disadvantage in a world which inevitably has to move to a low-carbon future.

This module will address the following questions:

- *What are the main political obstacles to aligning climate policy with climate science – and how can we overcome them?*
- *How will Europe maintain global leadership if not by leading by example?*
- *How can energy savings be made central to a new Climate and Energy Package? And what are the key priorities for the 2014 review of the Energy Efficiency Directive?*
- *Do EU policies deliver sufficient support – and of the right kind – for renewable energy?*
- *Will Europe be able to speak with one voice – and a strong voice – on climate change?*

13.00 -14.00 Lunch break

14.00 Module 3: Financing the transition to sustainability

With governments under continuous pressure to cut spending and private finance stored away in tax havens, the role of the financial sector in supporting a green transition is starting to receive increased attention, for example through the Transforming Finance initiative in the UK that recently brought together leading experts on the subject. At EU level, the new multi-annual budget for the period 2014 to 2020 has recently been agreed and, to a large extent because of pressure to reduce overall spending while at the same time continuing to serve vested interests, has failed to result in the needed re-direction of spending towards more sustainable practices. Budgets of national governments are put under scrutiny through the European Semester process, creating opportunities for reform in support of a green and socially just transition but also creating a threat by slashing expenditures for investments in environmental protection and social cohesion. This makes a debate about how the EU can put in place new policies and measures that will restore trust and confidence in the financial sector as well as ensure orientation of investments towards more sustainable projects an increasingly important one for the environmental movement to engage in.

This module will address the following questions:

- *What are the most important tools the EU can adopt to mobilize private finance for a green transition?*
- *What are the biggest obstacles to putting these in place?*

- *What policies and reforms are needed to restore trust in the financial sector?*
- *Should Europe play a bigger role in fiscal policies?*
- *How can the European Semester process be improved?*

15.30 – 16.00 Coffee break

16.00 Module 4: Getting the governance framework right

The challenges in delivering on the Europe 2020 Strategy's promise of an economy which is 'smart, sustainable and inclusive' are as much if not more about governance as about technological barriers. The position of 'sustainable development' within the hierarchy of EU policies is relevant here: the European Council has called for the EU Sustainable Development Strategy to be reviewed 'as soon as possible, and at the latest in 2014' and for the commitments in the Rio+20 outcome document to be implemented through the SDS and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Europe's approach to sustainability, as reflected in these strategies, must embrace the concept of global justice. A debate about governance also needs to address whether more or less 'government' is more likely to lead towards a more sustainable Europe. Ignoring the irony that the economic crisis was largely triggered by a lack of regulation in the banking sector, some have used the crisis as an excuse to push for deregulation or oppose any further regulation, including in the environmental sphere. An overlapping question is whether more or less 'Europe' is good for sustainability. With many European citizens questioning the European concept and even some Member States openly calling for 'less Europe', it is relevant to discuss the extent to which decisions taken at the European level have contributed to sustainability – and to what extent national vetoes obstruct progress towards more sustainability. Finally, and related to this, one has to ask if a sustainable Europe is one in which markets are the dominant force or democracy. The scenes played out on the streets of Athens and Madrid are reminders of the tension between these forces. In this European Year of Citizens, it is important that individual Europeans are not only recognized through rhetorical gestures but enjoy concrete rights to shape Europe's future. Even more so at a time when Europe is willing to even contemplate giving more rights to foreign companies under an EU-US Trade agreement than it is currently willing to give to its own citizens.

This module will address the following questions:

- *How can the EU become more democratic in the face of the current crisis?*
- *Could a reform of Europe 2020 Strategy in 2014 turn it into a real sustainable development strategy or will an overhaul and updating of the SDS be required as well?*
- *Does Europe play fair in the global context?*
- *Does greater European integration necessarily support greater sustainability? What is needed for it to do so?*
- *How will an EU-US trade agreement impact on the EU's ability to develop and implement progressive environmental policies?*

17.30 Closing remarks

18.00 Reception