



# Around Europe

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## Green Week 2011: Ambition is an Imperative

“Resource efficiency - Using less, living better” was the title of this year’s Green Week Conference, organised by the European Commission’s Directorate General for the Environment on 24-27 May. The conference incorporated many different themes, from



Waste and inefficiency: a sprawling monster made of plastic bags sitting outside the European Commission’s Berlaymont building. Image cc. Rachel Tansey.

the inadequacy of the GDP paradigm, the rebound effect and decoupling resource use from growth, to the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches and the demands of sustainable production and consumption. You can read a full account on our blog, <http://qceablog.wordpress.com>.

One of the biggest barriers to resource efficiency is consumer behaviour. It only takes a moment of reflection to see that when people are defined as “consumers”, it is not going to be an easy task to get them to fundamentally change their consumption patterns. Yet, Janez Potočnik, the Environment Commissioner, argued that resource efficiency is common sense. With many natural resources being both vital to our survival and limited, combined with rapid global population growth and the material aspirations of the less well-off majority of humankind, Potočnik argued that it is madness that we are still over-consuming and wasting resources.

Does that mean common sense is not so common after all? No, the Commissioner told the audience, our over-consumption and wastefulness occur because we are locked into systems, infrastructure, policies and habits that were designed for a time when resources weren’t scarce. Inefficiency has become a norm and material consumption has become associated with wealth. Many resources have been so cheap for so long that we assume they are plentiful, but that is because their prices don’t reflect their real value. The transition to resource efficiency requires a transformation in our behaviour and in our economies.

Connie Hedegaard, the Commissioner for Climate Action, suggested that people generally assume that in order to end up with the world as we know it, we simply need to continue business as usual. They assume that no change = no change. What people need to understand is that business as usual will not result in the world as we know it, but in a world of huge change, insecurity and great costs.

The messages of the Commissioners for the Environment and Climate Action were welcomed, but the conspicuous absence of any representative from DG Agriculture or DG Energy on most panels at the conference illustrated a wider point. A resource efficiency revolution is only conceivable if there is a constructive and deep dialogue with all actors and sectors - including the agricultural and energy sectors. A recent UN report tells us that one third of all food is wasted. In rich countries, it is thrown away; in poor countries, due to lack of infrastructure and logistics (storage, transport, refrigeration etc.), it is spoiled. Clearly, food, agriculture and land-use are key aspects of a transformation to resource efficiency. As, of course, is energy. Energy is the linchpin of our economies and the way it is currently used is the main contributor to climate change.

The most powerful message I took away from Green Week was the resounding call to policy makers to be ambitious! With every new environmentally-led policy proposal from the Commission - be it fuel efficiency standards in the auto-industry or more ambitious emissions reductions or energy savings targets -



business and industry tend to say;

*“We can’t do it! If you make us do what this legislation proposes, it’ll damage our competitiveness, jobs will be lost, Europe’s GDP will be dented...”*

Yet, time after time, a couple of years after these protestations of impossibility, companies have done it. They meet the demands of the new legislation, and it becomes evident that the change was possible. This argument has a parallel in history, in another era when Quakers were active in calling for change: the days leading up to the abolition of slavery. The slave trader’s defence was simple - how will you employ the thousands of sailors employed on slaving vessels, or the workmen on land, the carpenters, joiners, builders, riggers, gunsmiths, plumbers and labourers? Port cities will fall into decline, as will the manufacturing centres that depend on the slave trade for the export of their goods and import of raw materials. But as Caryl Phillips, in his book ‘The Atlantic Sound’, remarks, what these merchants ‘omitted to mention were the huge profits that were being made by a handful of the richest among them’.

There was a moral imperative to end slavery that outweighed any possible economic considerations. Climate change, resource scarcity and conflict over resources, have the potential to harm even more people than the heinous practice of slavery did. There is a moral and practical imperative to mitigate climate change and reduce our energy and resource consumption, to enable the developing world to make the transition onto cleaner development paths, without, in the meantime, dramatically overshooting the earth’s capacity to support us all.

The Commission must learn to be more ambitious in its legislative proposals, and not to water down changes that are necessary for our climate and environment (which won’t compromise), in the interests of big business (which will).

*Rachel Tansey*

<sup>1</sup> Phillips, Caryl, *The Atlantic Sound* (London: Vintage, Random House, 2001), p. 34

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## The Rafah Mission Must Close

On 26 May 2011 the Council of the European Union agreed to extend the mandate of the EU Crisis Management Mission (EU Border Assistance Mission) EUBAM Rafah. The previous mandate had ended on 25 May 2011. The new mandate runs to the end of the year.

### **The Facts in a Nutshell**

The border crossing at Rafah is a crossing point between Gaza and Egypt.

The mission has had a mandate to operate since 25 November 2005. It has, therefore technically had the potential to be open for 1713 days (up to and including 25 May 2011). It has actually been open for 295 days (14.69 per cent). Since July 2007 it has not been open at all. There are a number of different reasons why the crossing was closed at different times; it is clear, however, that in order for it to be open, the EU, the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel have to agree to it being open. This agreement has not been possible for much of the time.

Its objective is to assist in keeping the border crossing point between Gaza and Egypt open.

The money allocated to the mission to date (25 May 2011) is € 20.17 m; for the remainder of the year, a further € 1.4 m has been allocated.

By the end of May 2011, the Egyptian Government had opened the border crossing point for some of the time for some groups of people; restrictions on goods coming in and out of Gaza through this (and other crossings) are still in place according to local sources. However, it is important to note that there is some traffic through the crossing without the assistance of the mission.

At its height - and when the crossing was open and the EU mission staff were present at the crossing - the mission had 84 staff. Currently, the mission has 20 staff. They are based in Ashkelon in Israel. They apparently provide some training to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank though this is not well documented in the mission fact sheets.

### **What must be done?**

QCEA has been following the activities and fate of this mission since it was set up in 2005. At the time, the mission was part of the hope of a better future for the people of Gaza. We were optimistic that it would contribute to this. We have been disappointed by its



failure to do what it set out to do. We have been disappointed by the EU's failure to draw the consequences from this and to stop pretending that the mission is achieving its purpose.

We understand that there are those who feel that the mission should be left in place until it can assist in fully opening the border between Gaza and Egypt in Rafah or until it can assist on other border crossing points into and out of Gaza. We support any serious and effective contribution the EU could make to this and to the improvement of the situation of the people of Gaza.

But at this point we can only make the following recommendations:

- The Rafah Mission must close
- The money allocated to it must be spent on real contributions to peace in Palestine and Israel.

**Martina Weitsch**

1 Read our detailed briefing paper on the EU Crisis Management Missions in Palestine/Israel here on our website: <http://www.quaker.org/qcea/middle%20east/bp-mideast-csdpv2-en-may-2011.pdf>

## Anything other than energy demand reduction is a short-term solution

Are we trying to look at how we use energy today, or simply at how we replace it? Unfortunately, if you've been listening to the rhetoric of the last couple of months, you'd think we didn't have any choice at all - that we were exclusively limited to securing new sources of energy. From Germany's decision to phase out nuclear by 2022 and renewed interest in concentrated solar power generation in North Africa, to the Nabucco gas pipeline and Poland's quest for shale gas, the narrative has been one of supply-side solutions. In doing so, we're still blind to our greatest energy resource: energy savings and demand reduction.

An overwhelming body of evidence affirms that the cheapest, fastest and most reliable way to decarbonise our society is to invest in avoiding new power generation - so-called negawatts. Around the world, energy savings and demand reduction is seen as absolutely essential to the success of existing energy and climate legislation, with the EU recognising that it is unlikely to meet its emissions reduction goals without meeting its energy efficiency targets. Whilst it is already realistic to achieve over 70 per cent of energy savings using existing technologies, skilled labour, and financing, at the current rate, the EU will only improve its energy efficiency by 9 per cent by 2020, and the consequences could be tragic.

The political class as a whole is not preparing the public for how massive a problem this is. Anything other than energy demand reduction is a short-term solution, and an unthinking adherence to out-of-date, conflict-sensitive energy policies that are unsustainable. The defensiveness and unwillingness to accept that Europe is operating a growth model that has failed, makes it more difficult to get through to

the public about the scale of the problem. This is to everyone's loss.

The tremendous disconnect by the public and decision-makers to understand the gravity of our energy crisis is cause for concern. But is it all gloom and doom? Germany's and Switzerland's decision to phase out nuclear power, while increasing emissions in the short term (owing to the need to import more fossil fuels), can also be seen as a rejection of the economic model which transformed Germany into one of the richest countries in the world, and a leader in Europe. But Europe's generosity has its limits at a time of low growth and austerity.

Energy efficiency is not going to happen naturally. Instead, it requires real policy and legislative focus. Arguments over new sourcing of energy serve to highlight just how badly politicians are missing the point. Here is a snapshot of recent, energy security developments:

### ***Shale gas exploration experiences second earthquake***

*Shale gas exploration near Blackpool, in the United Kingdom, has been temporarily suspended following the second earthquake in the area since drilling started two months ago. Both earthquakes occurred within two kilometres of the exploration site, and were analogous enough in waveform to suggest a similar location and mechanism. The latest tremor occurred whilst the drilling company was injecting pressurised, rock-dissolving fluids into the shale formations at depth.*



### **Alternatives to Nabucco race ahead**

*With oil and gas shipments from Libya to Italy curtailed, still no resolution to a currently two-thirds empty Nabucco gas pipeline, and escalating construction costs, increased support is being expressed for Nabucco's smaller alternatives: the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), the Italy-Turkey-Greece Interconnector (ITGI).*

### **Germany and Switzerland to phase out nuclear**

*Germany's decision gives the country just over a decade to find alternative sources for 23 per cent of its energy, with plans to cut electricity usage by (just!?) 10 per cent, double the share of renewable supply, and greater forward planning (including grid infrastructure and storage capacity). Switzerland's 40 per cent nuclear energy shortfall by (possibly) 2034 would be compensated for by more hydroelectric plants, as well renewable resources like solar and wind power.*

### **Voluntary and biased nuclear stress tests**

*Unfortunately, no lesson seems to have been learnt from the Fukushima Daiichi crisis in Japan as plans for stress tests of Europe's nuclear reactors are revealed to only be voluntary, with no independent confirmation of the test findings, and no mention of what action should be taken in the case of a reactor failing its tests.*

### **Desertec - Turning the Arab Spring into Solar Gold**

*Despite recent upheavals in North Africa, many Desertec proponents are actively arguing that the Arab Spring will actually help the concentrating solar initiative become a reality. We can only hope that the development failures that have contributed to Ivory Coast's predicament do not influence the neo-colonial stirrings along the Mediterranean southern rim.*

Only time will tell if Europe takes a holistic and long-term view, and invests in the capacities that would bring about true prosperity for the region. The only things that can be said with certainty at the moment are: 1) before Fukushima and the Arab Spring - only three months ago - the energy world was a very different place, and 2) there could be a significant price to pay if we don't quickly extricate ourselves from our treadmill of acquisition, and opt for reduced demand.

**Paul Parrish**

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