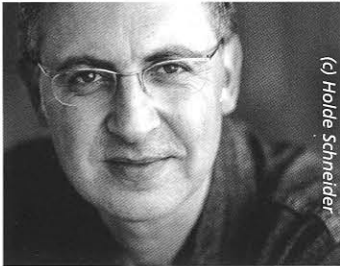


FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE



**Fouad Hamdan,
Director of Friends
of the Earth
Europe
shares his
thoughts on the
need for a
common European
energy policy**

In a recent Eurobarometer survey on "Energy Technologies: Knowledge, Perception, Measures", energy security and sustainability was only ranked the 12th most important issue for European citizens. What needs to be done so Europeans take ownership of the clean and sustainable energy issue?

The fields of energy security, climate change and increasing fuel and heating oil prices are all intermingled. It is very technical, very intellectual and not many people can link all the issues together.

Yet, there is a feeling in Europe that we have a problem, that climate change is occurring, and that this is very bad. Some people know it is because of their heating system, or the car they drive. Others do not like pipelines being shut down by Russia here and there, or being dependent on oil-rich Arab countries.

The energy issue affects European citizens' day-to-day life, yet, at this point they do not feel it is so dramatic. But the issue is gaining momentum. We know very well that we do not have enough oil in the world, therefore, as an NGO, we do not have to do very much for the people of Europe to take ownership of the clean energy issue.

On the political level, both at the EU level and in the Member State capitals, officials know exactly what is going on: There is not enough oil for all of us, whether we like it or not. European politicians are now panicking, and are finally producing the reports we have always wanted on the economics of Climate Change, on how much it costs not to act now. The UK's Stern Review is beautiful!

The US was always saying it would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol because it would damage its economy. Well, that position was just proven wrong by the Americans' best allies, the British. It is inaction, not signing the Kyoto Protocol, not lowering CO₂ emissions that will damage the economy and cost a much higher price in the long run.

The EU prides itself on being at the forefront of environmental protection; yet EU Member States are far from achieving their Kyoto objectives. In your opinion, what should be done so the EU's commitment to address climate change moves away from rhetoric and towards a meaningful improvement?

It is a fact that the EU does not have a common energy policy. Each Member State has its own plan, and goes about it its own way. The current state of things is absolutely chaotic and weakens Europe.

Member State governments now realise that selfish energy policies do not work, that they can only have a secure energy supply if they support each other and create a unified energy policy. This common energy policy is the prerequisite to solving European problems with Kyoto, with Putin or with oil-producing Arab countries. Of course, the constitution coming into force would also send a strong message.

In our opinion, this common energy policy should also come with a radical shift away from the current energy investments in coal and nuclear energy, to invest massively into renewables. Politicians have no other choice and they know it. Even politicians who are massively behind their industry know this cannot last. In Germany, North Rhine-Westphalia is coal country and it is political suicide there to do anything against coal. Germany is therefore under pressure from its regions, to

keep on living in the energy Middle Ages, and in doing so prevents Europe from moving in the right direction.

Another example, the French nuclear policy is also unsustainable. We will run out of uranium in 50 years! Why are they currently investing billions in to the so-called new generation of nuclear power plants? It makes no economic sense!

This predicament can only be bypassed if the policy comes from Europe. The national politicians can always blame Brussels: "Sorry we had to give up coal, but it's because of that bloody EU..." This is not

feasible at the moment as we do not have a common energy policy. Member States will eventually have to agree to give up sovereignty in this domain, this is why we need this constitution. All these issues are linked.

What we need is an intelligent, far-reaching energy policy, instead of the chaotic, uncoordinated, panicky energy policy we have. Short-term solutions are not viable: a bit more oil here, a few more tonnes of uranium there. We need policies drafted by statesmen and not short-term politicians who only look to the next elections.

In the light of the failed UNFCCC Nairobi summit, couldn't the EU's Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) be interpreted as the EU giving up on a global solution to Climate Change?

Friends of the Earth Europe believes that the UN negotiations on climate change in the Kenyan capital Nairobi ended with mixed results and only modest progress on the Kyoto international climate treaty.

We welcomed the progress made during the negotiations on future commitments by industrialised

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countries to reduce their CO₂ emissions. Unfortunately no end date has been agreed to for such negotiations. Additional discussions on the implications for emission levels in the rapidly developing countries like China or Brazil have been postponed until 2008. This could result in a dangerous delay of the next phase of the Kyoto Protocol, which would harm investment security for clean energy industries like renewables in

efficiency technologies.

Friends of the Earth Europe is also becoming increasingly doubtful about the effectiveness of the ETS. In our view, governments will continue to abuse the system to protect their industries from change rather than lowering greenhouse gas emissions. The initial submissions of the National Action Plans (NAPs) of the second round showed an increase in allocated permits for most countries instead of a reduction. This is keeping the price of carbon too low, creating little incentive to invest in new technologies.

Auctioning the permits would create extra revenue for governments, that could then be recycled back into the energy industry, eg by supporting renewable energies. Another key failure of the system lies in allowing, as was the case for the German government, to base its allocations in the power sector on the fuel used rather than on kilowatts per hour. This meant that high-emission coal-fired power stations received twice as many permits as low-emission gas-fired power stations. Clearly not an incentive to switch to cleaner fuels!

As for ETS efficiency: a recent German study showed that reducing one tonne of CO₂ through the ETS costs the overall economy €1,100. Whereas one tonne of CO₂ avoided through the feed-in law for renewable energies costs only €57. The ETS definitely needs a serious overhaul to make it a real cost-effective tool to reduce CO₂ emissions.

Science is still far from conclusive on the possible health and environmental risks of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). However, is there not a risk the EU could be missing out on the next great technological revolution by being over-cautious?

Friends of the Earth Europe works on genetically modified (GM) food and crop issues at the EU level. Whilst FoEE is not against technology or research, we see no benefits in applying biotechnology to foods and crops (we do not address other areas of biotechnology and do not have a position on these other applications).

30 years of EU research has resulted in the commercialisation of just two GM traits (herbicide resistant and insecticide tolerant). Research after ten years of commercialisation now firmly indicates that, contrary to what industry wanted us to believe, pesticide use does not decrease with GMOs and yield is not higher than with conventional crops. There is therefore no financial benefit for farmers to use GMOs, even the GMO-induced convenience of having to use just one herbicide does not last, as weed resistance and volunteer growth develops. As for GM crops that could grow in adverse climatic

conditions (salt resistant and drought resistant), they are years away from being commercialised. In any case, as was recently announced by the biotech industry, these crops would first be commercialised in the US rather than in developing countries struggling with poverty and hunger issues.

The impact of GMOs on the environment and on human health is not yet known, and this scientific uncertainty is now widely accepted. Genetic contamination at field and food levels is irreversible, and there are currently no systems available to ensure that no contamination of crops and food occurs.

The biotech industry refuses to accept that it must be liable for the GMOs it produces and this is yet another reason why GMOs should not be eaten or grown.

Biofuels have recently suffered from bad press. They are being accused of, for example, costing more energy to produce than they yield, or of depriving Less Developed Countries of their food-producing land. As Friends of Earth calls for 20% of renewable energies in Europe's energy mix by 2020, what is your position on biofuels?

Biofuels could be beneficial to rural communities and to biodiversity. However, an aggressive strategy by the EU, supported by a powerful industry lobby, looks certain to result in schemes that will cause serious environmental problems.

We agree that there could be possible benefits such as reductions in CO₂ emissions, increased income for farmers, reduced EU food dumping and less dependence on fossil fuels; but the problems a large scale production of biofuels could cause are immense.

Encouraging developing nations to produce biofuels for cars in the US and the EU means exporting our environmental problems to meet our energy needs. Large areas of agriculture land and pristine forests will be needed for this production. This has the potential to disrupt food security, increase international transport and damage biodiversity.

It is questionable whether some biofuel proposals will actually reduce greenhouse gases. The additional CO₂ released through increasing the amount of farmland, the use of fertilisers and the energy required to produce bioethanol are concerns. Estimating the impact of such production plans remains hard to predict.

We believe that only biofuels which contribute to a real reduction in greenhouse gases and are environmentally and socially sustainable should be permitted. The EU needs to set the global standards for the production of biofuels.

If you could set one item on the Commission's environmental agenda for 2007, what would it be?

A European common energy policy.

Implement the Stern report and we will be happy. Forget NGOs, just listen to what Stern says, and we will be happy, very happy.

**Interview by Leah Charpentier
Communications Officer**