

Check against delivery

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Climate Change –

The Role of the Metropolitan
Regions in the Current Debate –

Best Practice and
Co-operation

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Climate change is a fact – it's happening the world over

The IPCC report says it is indisputable: the global warming of our atmosphere is advancing ever faster. Basically speaking, the UN's scientific forecast only confirms what we have been experiencing for years.

The average world temperature has been measured since 1850. Eleven of the twelve years from 1995 to 2006 were among the warmest since those measurements were first recorded.

Headlines are often more convincing than any statistics.

- On 3rd October 2007, the front page headline of Independent International read: "Record temperatures – Arctic heat wave of 22° Celsius."

July temperatures in the Arctic are normally about 5° Centigrade or lower. At 4.3 million km² the expanse of the Arctic ice was some 40% below the average for the years 1979 to 2000.

On 21st August this year, the Northwest Passage, the quickest route from Europe to Japan and China, north of Alaska and Kanada, was free of ice for perfectly normal merchant vessels. For centuries seafarers from James Cook to Sir John Franklin had risked their lives on expeditions in attempts to traverse the Northwest Passage – all in vain. It was not until 1906 that Roald Amundsen was the first to succeed.

The impact of climate change is already highly conspicuous. In the future it will be unmanageable: the following newspaper headlines appeared in June 2007.

- “A whole nation fears a state of emergency – Italy has dried up”. Deaths from heat and storm floods in Europe.
- “It is the poor that suffer most from climate change. One billion people live under threat of acute water shortage.
- “China battling with its biggest floods in 50 years. Forests burning in Corsica. The first snow in Buenos Aires for 89 years.”

The IPCC report is unequivocal: it is 90% certain that man is, or more precisely, all of us are, responsible for this climate change. Unless we cut our CO₂ emissions drastically, the consequences of climate change will increase to a massive extent. The challenge for us all is to act.

As European metropolitan regions we have a special responsibility

A study carried out by Siemens into the future of cities came to the following conclusion: cities cause 80% of greenhouse gases although they occupy only 0.4% of the Earth's surface.

If we take the ‘polluter pays’ principle seriously, these figures also substantiate the special responsibility of the European metropolitan regions.

- In Germany, we emit 10.2 tons of CO₂ a year per head of population.
- In Italy, they emit 7.2 tons per capita per year.
- In France, it is 6.4 tons, and
- in the United States of America 19.7 tons.

India currently emits about one tenth of our German CO₂ emissions, China about one third.

Only if we in Europe and America are to make a long-term, truly tangible and effective contribution to reducing global warming, we have the right to demand the same of people in Asia.

As European metropolitan regions we have a realistic chance of discharging our responsibility

The UN climate report drew up six scenarios for the rise in temperature and the rise in the sea level, with and without the melting of the Polar ice caps, by the end of the century.

Working on the most probable estimate, we shall see a rise in temperature of between 1.8° Celsius and 4° Celsius.

The most favourable scenario for the world's climate is Scenario B 1, with a rise in average annual temperatures of 1.8° Celsius.

This scenario is a huge challenge for mankind, particularly for us as European metropolitan regions and: it is achievable.

Scenario B 1 focuses on global solutions for economic, social and environmental sustainability.

The prerequisites are:

- A rapid transformation of our economic structures towards a service and information economy
- A tangible increase in the efficiency of materials in the production of goods and
- The introduction of clean production technologies that are sparing on resources, especially renewable energy.

It is precisely in these areas that the metropolitan regions have potential, which is why we are also obliged to act.

The potential that obliges us to act

More than 30% of all research and development funding in Europe is generated in the ten leading regions. On average, 1.9% of gross domestic product in the European Union is spent on research and development; in the Stuttgart Region it is about 6%.

Major, world-leading companies in the Stuttgart Region are starting to regard environmental technology as an opportunity. Bosch has astonishing growth figures in the field of alternative energies: geothermal and solar energy, component supplies for wind power plants and of course automotive electronics, which contributes to the Brussels climate targets for new cars being achieved. Daimler AG is committed to the Blue Line.

In our metropolitan regions, we have the critical mass for climate-friendly local transport. When a person travels 1 kilometre in the Stuttgart Region by car, the CO₂ emission is 176 grams. When that person travels by rapid transit railway, 60 grams of CO₂ are emitted, i.e. a third.

A special role is played by climate-friendly housing and regional development. Stipulations in local authority urban land-use plans on how energy is supplied to houses and a region with short distances, controlled by regional planning, must help reduce the greenhouse effect.

The four most popular subterfuges for climate protection and what we reply to them:

First excuse: "Things are never as bad as they look."

This is the excuse Al Gore was up against most when he wrote his book "Earth in the Balance". It was particularly popular among the Texan oil

industry, which dubbed Al Gore “Mr. Ozone” in the presidential election campaign in 2000. This excuse is refuted by the UN climate report on which 2,500 scientists worldwide collaborated.

Second excuse: “We are the winners in climate change.”

In British Columbia, not far from the receding icebergs, they are growing Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes; the milder climate will herald in a property boom in and around New York right up to Nova Scotia. In the Baltic agreeable temperatures in the summer will make 24-hour bathing a reality.

These and similar winners were identified by the 23rd April issue of Newsweek. It ignores occurrences such as extreme weather conditions. As the ocean is warming up, tornadoes will be reaching New York in the future. It would become very critical for the port of New York if the sea level were to rise by several metres.

Quite apart from the fact that the “winners” will become the destination for an unmanageable number of climate refugees.

Third excuse: “We’ll repair the climate.”

Under the headline “We’ll repair the climate”, this April the Italian magazine Focus pointed up a few examples.

Should the Gulf Stream ebb owing to general global warming, we will pump up cold water in the Arctic from the bottom of the sea using wind-powered pumps, add salt to it, and thus get the Gulf Stream moving again. Another suggestion is using rockets to lay a ring of dust around the Earth and thus reduce the flow of heat occurring.

This all reminds me too much of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s poem “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” to entertain such ideas of recreating the climate.

Fourth excuse: “Unless there’s a global solution it’s a waste of time. With their rapidly increasing greenhouse emissions America, India and China will wipe out our savings.”

Firstly, this view is wholly undifferentiated. There is a growing awareness in the United States, but also in India and China, of the necessity of climate-friendly behaviour. Secondly, we as the main polluters have the duty to make our contribution and take the opportunity to do the right thing through political action and by exporting climate technology and to benefit from this politically.

What we can do in our metropolitan regions – some examples:

- We are the administrative authorities for local public transport. It is up to us to develop climate-friendly bus and rail networks.
- We have the possibility of combining cycle path systems or park-and-ride schemes with rail transport.
- We can prevent people having to travel unnecessary distances by incorporating compact housing development in our regional planning.
- We can instruct our business promotion corporations with clear objectives for pushing ahead with climate-friendly technologies.
- As the owners of public buildings we are in a position to set a good example by pressing ahead with heat insulation and energy-saving technology.
- Our colleagues in Northern Virginia have taught us in Stuttgart the concept of “green infrastructure”. Local recreation, cycling, walking in public parks or in the vicinity of our housing has to be and remain attractive.

I am sure we will come across a whole series of further examples at this conference.

METREX's contribution to a metropolitan climate policy

Eleven years ago in Glasgow our colleagues set up METREX as the network of European metropolitan regions. The aim was and still is to come up with better solutions for regional problems by exchanging experience, by metropolitan exchange.

Since then the network has grown to include 50 European metropolitan regions, from Porto to Moscow, from Naples via Hamburg to Glasgow.

“Climate change – regional change” is the motto that has been underlying our work since the autumn meeting of our network in Granada in 2005.

Four weeks ago we visited the Expo 2008 site in Zaragoza that goes by the title “H₂O – Water and sustainable development”. Many of the far-reaching consequences of climate change are associated with water; with water shortage, water purification, water as a source of food and nutrition for people.

Two weeks ago along with a METREX delegation in Shanghai we gained a highly revealing insight into the environmental challenges of a booming Chinese metropolis and into the high-tech solutions they are also working on in China. But implementing climate change in Chinese politics remains a challenge.

Our Secretary General Roger Read and colleagues from Hamburg are currently preparing an application for an EU project. The project will produce concrete support for effective strategies to reduce CO₂ in metropolitan regions.

Then, next April, we will take our thorough preparations as the basis for our meeting with American metropolitan regions on climate change. You are most cordially invited to attend this conference. I feel that this is our opportunity for engaging in a bottom-up process with American colleagues from metropolitan regions to push ahead with what the present US government rejects and to achieve concrete measures in the USA as well.

So far, more than half the US states have signed up to the Kyoto Protocol although the federal government has not. This shows that on a metropolitan level we can make a contribution to the sustainable development in climate change not just in our own region but also in Europe and beyond.

I would like to thank Gerald Connolly, Chairman of the Northern Virginia Regional Commission, and his team for proposing a follow-up conference in Washington from 9th to 12th April 2008.

Finally I would like to thank the Free Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the metropolitan region of Hamburg for organising this conference.

I am looking forward to important initiatives for concrete action in climate protection.

Signed

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