

Europe-Award 2011 of the Schwarzkopf Foundation Young Europe  
Laudation to Connie Hedegaard, EU Commissioner for Climate Action  
Berlin, 24 November 2011

Tobias Bütow

Dear Commissioner Hedegaard, lieber Herr Staatsrat Schmidt,  
lieber André, lieber Dieter Kosslick, honorable guests, dear friends of Europe,

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

„In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.”

Believe this – or not, trust in this – or not. I believe and I trust in this. However, the first chapter of Genesis of the Old Testament reminds us of very basic facts:

- 1.) Our planet is quite old.
- 2.) Us human beings arrived quite late in the “evolution.”
- 3.) We did not create this world.
- 4.) As we all know, we are affecting the climate. But actually our planet was not only first – it is the one who is strong. At the end of the day, we are the once who are weak.
- 5.) We are currently facing a crisis of historical and unique dimensions. I am not talking about the man-made financial crisis. The climate change is the meta-crisis

of our times. The relationship between our host – our planet – and us is at risk. It carries more hazards and risks and therefore importance than the man-made financial crisis many European politicians haven't been able to solve so far or have been too afraid to solve.

For those of you who do not believe in God or in the integrity of creation: Think of Immanuel Kant and the very logical argument of liberalism: It is cooperation that makes people to survive and prosper, it is not conflict. And we are currently in a conflict with our planet. How naive!

But when it comes to the climate change, us human beings also have several internal conflicts. Climate change embodies a very serious international conflict between the developed and the less developed world. Not only that: Climate conflicts already shape some regions of the world. Darfur for example, was considered to be the one of the first excesses of violence that was triggered by climate-change and its repercussions on the regional African system. But climate change also enfolds a social conflict between generations, also between generations in Europe. And this fact makes today's evening and today's award-winner even more special, as it is an award given from one generation to another.

But some of our jury members have already the incredible pleasure to be parents and have young kids. My own youngest daughter was born in one of the hottest summers ever recorded, last year. The climate-change generation is now alive. It is especially them who will experience the positive or negative affects of our climate action at the end of this 21th century. Knowing the anger and hope, the frustration and visions of my generation when it comes to climate policy, I can imagine that their generation will be more radical in evaluating the climate action

– or passivity or destructiveness – of their predecessors. I hope that their generation won't see the need to extend International Criminal Law and International Criminal Courts and to define „climate crimes“ as „crimes against humanity“. Because at the end of the day, that's what they are.

Claus Leggewie and Harald Welzer, two leading German social scientists, published in a remarkable book a strong metaphor for the climate change: They compare it with a flood wave, with a Tsunami. They remind us that a Tsunami does not start with the flood wave, but with water suddenly drawing back. They claim that our societies are exactly at this point. We are standing at the beautiful beach, taking note that the waves do not make the noise they used to make, but that they draw back. Is it really evil what is going to happen? So, what shall we do? Some of us stay and watch what might happen next – others take action.

Today we would like to honor someone who takes action. Someone who tries to solve that conflict between our planet and us. Someone who does not belong to the group of self-referential decision-makers in whatever sector of society who are hostile against our future. Someone who not only tries to warn us of the possible Tsunami, but who tries to solve this meta-crisis. Someone who stands in the first row of decision makers and who contributes to a visionary, but pragmatic emergency plan: Connie Hedegaard. And we have the honour that she is today with us. Welcome to Berlin!

Connie Hedegaard is the **first ever** Climate Action Commissioner of the European Commission or – as the British daily Guardian called her kindly – the „European Climate Chief“. Other media gave her the honorable title “Jeanne d' Arc of Climate Action.”

“First ever” – this seems to be a suitable characteristics for her. Why?

- 1) Let's start with today's evening and a little secret: So far we had ten award winners, between them outstanding Europeans like Carla Del Ponte, Dieter Kosslick or Jean-Claude Juncker. But Connie Hedegaard is the first who received each single vote of our jury members. And this in spite of very strong candidates we had aside from her – but whose names I won't mention for reasons of politeness. Unanimity, in a jury of YOUNG EUROPEANS. We truly spoke with one voice.
  
- 2) First ever: When Connie Hedegaard joined the Danish Parliament at the age of 23, she was the youngest member of Parliament in Danish history. But later on, for some years, she left politics for becoming a well-known and awarded journalist in Denmark. Only 7 years ago she returned to Parliament and the Danish government.
  
- 3) First ever: When Miss Hedegaard was appointed the Danish Minister for Climate policy and Energy in 2007, she became the first ever Danish Minister for Climate Change and Energy. Also thanks to her Denmark is today the forerunner in Europe and worldwide when it comes to Climate Action. Currently only the Maldives Islands adopted more eager goals when it comes to Climate Action. But in this policy field the endangered Maldives have a different background, a different threat scenario, a different role than Denmark.

Connie Hedegaard became world famous in 2009 when she was chairing the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Action. Her experience in media contributed an overwhelming media mobilization in the run-up and during the Copenhagen

conference. Thanks to her preparation and guidance the conference gained media attention in a so far unknown scale. The European and international public was reached and sensitized, including myself. Moreover, this mobilization led to an unknown dynamic in the run-up to one of the biggest diplomatic conferences in the history of international negotiations. Before the conference was launched, the European Union was the only region in the world with regional self-targets. But also due to that mobilization something totally new but pivotal happened: Countries like Russia, Japan, Mexico, Indonesia, China, India, Singapore or South Africa decided domestically to set self-targets. Climate Action is a step-by-step process with a clear vision and a shared political will.

Soon after Miss Hedegaard was appointed as – once more – the **first** EU Commissioner for Climate Action she demonstrated how European Foreign Policy and European Diplomatic Action should work in the post-Lisbon era at the international arena: Together. At the conference in Cancun, with her at the forefront the European Union spoke with one voice. Successfully. Several of EU's goals have been achieved, including getting a commitment to keep global warming to less than 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial level – inscribed into a UN document for the first time.

All this brought her well under the top 100 decision makers ranked by TIME magazine. Moreover, the New York Times recently summarized wisely: „Connie Hedegaard embodies the way the European Commission would like to be perceived in the 21th century.“ There is probably no nicer compliment, a US-American journal can give to a European politician. In our view she is a diplomat, a trend- and policy setter and a post-modern revolutionary.

The next political project is already on its way and sparked off quite an international debate, especially by air carriers as well as in the US Senate: EU's Emission Trading System to get into force as of January 2012. Air carriers taking off or landing in Europe and polluting the atmosphere will be asked to pay for an emission certificate, around a dozen Dollar per flight and passenger. Lobbyists of the air industry painted already a "trade war" into our future skies. In our opinion the critic from this side only proved that the Commission is giving a path-breaking example of climate action and follows a way of deescalating a multidimensional conflict – which is partly caused by the airplanes we use to be mobile and dynamic in this globalized world.

All those years Connie Hedegaard highlighted the worrying inconsistency between what is happening and what should be happening. Observers describe her as trying to use the economic crisis to look into new ways of economy, to strengthen the "re-industrialization of Europe" (Connie Hedegaard), to foster the pivotal energy efficiency and to create a green fiscal policy. This political engagement for Climate Action is also connected to the pivotal question, if democracies will be able to fight the complex phenomena of global warming. All this is an eminently political question, including a question of conflict management and conflict prevention.

Many observers describe her as a formidable negotiator in a stifling political climate. Having a transversal portfolio of key importance for future generations and the planet as a whole, in many occasions of her impressive political career she has demonstrated political independence.

Climate Action is, as you say, dear Commissioner Hedegaard, "difficult stuff". Just today Die ZEIT published an interview with you, in which you confessed your

personal opinion of all those climate summits with thousands of delegates and lengthy discussions. You said: "I hate these sessions. Everything takes so endlessly long."

But, as you said in another occasion: "The world can not afford business as usual." Dear Miss Hedegaard, with this award a jury of young people coming from 13 different countries from Czech Republic, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ireland, Azerbajdjan, Hungary, Turkey, the Netherlands, Serbia, Poland, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Germany - we would like to say thank you for your future-oriented climate action. For your impatience, for your commitment, for your political creativity and your political strength.

We need more European unity of the kind you are creating in this globalized, interdependent world – not less. The Europe you are building is the Europe we would like to live in. And I am sure for such a future you and we need more citizens to follow your climate action and to remember how old and strong our planet is and how young and small, but powerful we are.

All the best for Durban and for all your political challenges to come! Thank you!