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Claus Sauter, Bioenergy Expert, Founder & CEO of VERBIO AG addresses current issues of (bio)energy, energy security and (green) mobility

Column

Goodbye Germany: The fast lane for environmentally friendly mobility leads to the USA

While the traffic lights are on red in Germany for the use of advanced mobility concepts, the USA is on green and has given the go-ahead to innovative climate-friendly technologies

President Donald Trump caused widespread anger when he rejected the Paris climate accord, seeing it as a threat to the strength of the United States' industrial base. While "America bashing" is fashionable, it has been helpful to politicians in Germany to paint a simple picture of the US as the only guilty party responsible for a failed climate policy. This has been a great way to deflect attention from domestic failures, but the reality is steadily catching up.

This anti-American sentiment simply ignores the reality that the USA is decades ahead of Germany in terms of climate protection in the transport sector. The USA has already been using alternative power sources and has not placed all its efforts into electro mobility alone – so it is not surprising that the US targets for advanced biofuels in 2018 are already twenty times as high as they are in the European Union for 2030!

Here, tricks are used to make electro mobility look better than it is. How? Simply by sweeping under the carpet all the emissions that are created by coal fired power stations. The 38th BImSchV and the UER Regulation – which have been in force since the start of 2018 – even provide assistance to fossil fuels and are brutally pushing biofuel concepts out of the market place even when they are already commercially viable. Investments in long-term "Made in Germany" research and development projects costing millions are being torpedoed.

In the USA, on the other hand, E10 is the standard fuel, and E15 will be offered from summer 2019. Also, the real potential offered by biomethane for decarbonising transport has been recognised for some time now. California is seeing a real RNG ⁽¹⁾ boom.

(1) RNG Renewable Natural Gas (= Biomethane)

The “California Air Resources Board” (CARB), which uncovered the VW Diesel scandal, considers RNG generated from agricultural waste products to be the cleanest fuel, and has certified it with a CO₂ negative value of MINUS 255 g CO₂ eq/MJ. Yes – you did read that correctly: A NEGATIVE emissions value has been calculated, as methane emissions have been avoided that would otherwise have been created by the storage and application of liquid manure as well as by the natural rotting process for straw in the fields. And rightly so! Because methane emissions are 25 times as damaging for the climate as CO₂.

If this approach was used in Germany the CO₂ emissions from coal-fired power stations would be included, and as a result electro mobility would currently be shown to have a worse effect on the climate than diesel from fossil fuel sources!

However, parts of the German Federal Government are conducting a very successful ideological battle against the combustion engine. The Federal Government needs to be careful that it doesn't create the same bloodbath that it did with the once very successful energy sector.

Dear Federal Government, Dear Federal Minister for the Environment, if you would recognise the value of biomethane generated from domestic agricultural waste, you would not need to fear the effects of ambitious climate targets. It only needs a challenging GHG quota for the transport sector in general, and specifically for advanced second generation biofuels, together with the use of an honest Well-to-Wheel approach for the automobile industry in determining fleet limits.

Financial subsidy programmes with an additional burden for the Federal budget or the taxpayer? No! We don't need it! There is a business model that works. One that offers a cleaner, greener biomethane, which is cheaper than petrol and diesel!

We already had a bio-share of almost 25 percent of CNG fuels. This has fallen to under 15 percent (!) since the beginning of the year as a result of your new directive. This is not because there is any lack of a renewable methane generated from sustainable sources, and not because production facilities are unavailable or because the technology is not ready for the market place. No! It is simply because YOU, our dear politicians, have decided that it should be this way – with your current legislation. It is not the industry which has too little ambition, it is the politics!

Where is the pressure on the oil majors going to come from, to make use of climate-friendly fuels, when the GHG quota, which has been set too low in any case, can be met using fossil fuels? A GHG quota for 2020 for advanced biofuels of 0.05 percent is a joke. But this is not a joke to laugh at! You have sacrificed Germany's climate protection goals, and it is high time that you stop pointing the finger at others and put your own house in order. More pragmatism and less ideology. More honesty and less fighting.

For VERBIO this means: Goodbye Germany! We are going to a country where we can find reliable, long-term framework conditions, and we are going to produce green energy from 2020 onwards for Nevada, Iowa – with process technology that was “Made in Germany”.

At the beginning of November VERBIO signed a purchase agreement for the cellulose ethanol plant belonging to the DuPont Group. We will use this location and existing plant elements for straw processing, and complement it with a straw biomethane production plant with a capacity of 20 megawatts – based on our German model plant. This will create new jobs and new perspectives for the agricultural economy in the region. And Nevada is just the start for us in the American market, for sure. The American biofuels market is six times the size of its European equivalent.

For years now, I have been highlighting bad political decisions. I have hoped that there will be perspectives beyond the limited horizon of electro mobility, there will be more openness to new technologies and a new honesty concerning climate protection. For nothing!

I cannot stand this two-faced waffle about German climate protection any longer – and it seems that complaining will not help anything. At least, it won't help me! This is why we are now going to a new country, where we and our technology and know-how are welcome.

Have fun with fake "Made in Germany" environmental protection, and warm regards from Donald Trump!

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