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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

### Climate politics in Germany: Stop this monkey business!

Four demands to the Climate Cabinet meeting on September 20, 2019

*However controversial Greta Thunberg and FridaysForFuture may currently be, one thing is certain: young people have shocked Germany's politicians into action and made sure that the Federal Government is finally doing its homework on climate protection. However, there is a danger that the green revolution ends up as just another paper tiger, if politicians and commercial interests simply rub their hands in self-indulgence and incompetence.*

Just when German society was looking tired of politics and appeared sluggish and egocentric, the young generation has stood up and is telling the Federal Government in no uncertain terms what it thinks of its climate protection measures to date. Nothing at all! Loud and clear, youth is demanding exactly what ministers have so successfully avoided so far – respect! These young activists have been successful in doing something that their parents and grandparents, the would-be elite and even industry with its trade associations before them have not achieved. They have forced the Federal Government to take action.

Suddenly climate protection is right at the top of the political agenda. The “Climate Chancellor”, now in the home stretch of her Chancellorship, presents a Climate Cabinet, perhaps in order to have a chance of keeping the Greens in check. Markus Söder, the leader of the CSU, demands that climate protection should be written into the constitution. Thank you for the roar, you lion! Now do something!

While politicians are under more and more pressure, German industry is ducking the issue as only it knows how – with a few exceptions. For example, Herbert Diess (1) has criticised the Federal Government sharply for the wrong priorities it has set in its energy turnaround. The coal industry should have been stopped first, before the exit from nuclear power. The VW chairman has got it. Joe Kaeser, too; the Chairman of the Management Board of Siemens AG sees that the automobile industry and its supply chain are confronted with dramatic change. He is concerned about the end of the German economy as we know it. In addition, Ariane Reinhart, member of the board of Conti, has made it clear that the solution cannot be a one-dimensional focus on electro mobility. (2) Hats off to you! However, the DAX has another 27 companies who remain silent. This is unbelievable, because climate protection affects industry as much as anyone!

(1) Source: Interview “Tagesspiegel Background”, [https://background.tagesspiegel.de/Die-Kernkraftwerke-sollten-laenger-laufen?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter%2Bbgek](https://background.tagesspiegel.de/Die-Kernkraftwerke-sollten-laenger-laufen?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter%2Bbgek), May 31, 2019 (in German)

(2) Source: “Handelsblatt”, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/industrie/hofmann-und-reinhart-im-interview-risiko-elektromobilitaet-iq-metall-chef-und-conti-vorstaendin-kritisieren-politik/24364586.html?ticket=ST-14769299-WtOgY4JWklqkAZ0eo41u-ap1>, May 22, 2019 (in German)

**What we need is qualified and constructive protests from industry and its trade associations.  
The time for communal plundering is long gone!**

Politicians are acting without a plan. They meet, define new terminology and suggest that promising new laws may be on the way, but at the end of the day they don't know what they should do next. At the same time there are concrete solutions readily available, at least for the transport sector, which I am qualified to talk about. Here, the basis for CO<sub>2</sub> pricing was laid with the greenhouse gas reduction quota (GHG quota) as early as 2015. The only problem is that Ms. Schulze, our "Federal Minister for Incompetence", needs to make proper use of it – she does not understand her own system.

With the introduction of the GHG quota the Federal Ministry for the Environment has required the oil industry to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The reduction currently required is 4 percent. ONLY 4 PERCENT! Looking at it the other way, that makes the other 96 percent legal. Dear Svenja, why are you satisfied with so little?

The Federal Government could have reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from diesel and petrol by more than six times that amount (25 percent) using highly efficient biofuels and biomethane from liquid manure, dung and straw – without causing significant increases in the cost of the fuel. Instead, we have chosen to give away 60 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> savings every year.

Almost everywhere in Europe the quotas for climate friendly fuels are higher than they are here in Germany. Nothing will be achieved without a legal obligation on the part of the oil industry to reduce emissions from diesel and petrol. Then the German Association of the Automotive Industry (Verband der Automobilindustrie e.V. – VDA), together with the German Automobile Club (Allgemeiner Deutscher Automobil-Club e.V. – ADAC) and the German Petroleum Industry Association (Mineralölwirtschaftsverband – MWV), will have no hesitation continuing to prevent an increase in the GHG quota. How long are German politicians prepared to make themselves look stupid?

I don't want to sit on my hands while our country is destroyed by lack of action or by inappropriate dependencies. I don't want to have to apologise to my children and say that the adults were just too comfortable and stupid to take responsibility for taking effective steps to protect the climate.

**For this reason, looking forward to the meeting of the Climate Cabinet on September 20, 2019, I am making clear demands in order to decarbonise transport:**

**First demand: Increase the greenhouse gas quota!**

Once and for all, stop thinking about technologies! Leave that to the industry. If you really want to achieve a significant reduction in emissions and clean air, then simply raise the GHG quota! The market will do the rest. A higher quota increases the demand for proven and new biofuels – making it economic to develop and produce them. The result would be investment and the creation of the necessary production capacity. So, Svenja, stick to your task and define the objective! We have a system that works well; all it needs is an ambitious target. That means a GHG quota significantly ABOVE 10 PERCENT, and ongoing increases in the quota up until 2025.

A CO<sub>2</sub> tax is nonsense! It will not help you make progress in the transport sector at all – it will merely cause uproar in the population. The GHG quota creates a price for CO<sub>2</sub> which is fairly allocated to the polluter, and is socially fair because it is paid by those who use the most fuel.

## **Second demand: Extend the toll exemptions for CNG/LNG heavy goods vehicles until 2024!**

Everyone talks about the passenger vehicle traffic on our roads, although two thirds of diesel consumption in Germany is caused by light and heavy goods vehicles. The Federal Government prefers to address the emotional consumption behaviour of tens of thousands of car drivers than achieve the same target with a few hundred transport companies who take decisions on a rational basis.

The much-criticised Federal Minister of Transport has set an unprecedented example with the toll exemptions for low-emission medium and heavy goods vehicles, effective from January 1, 2019. Although the toll exemptions for CNG heavy goods vehicles are only for a limited period of two years up until the end of 2020, the number of new registrations has exploded since the beginning of the year. This is understandable, given that electro mobility does not offer any solutions for the foreseeable future.

An extension of the toll exemptions is an important basis for more investment by transport companies, as according to the Ökoinstitut (Institut für angewandte Ökologie – Institute for Applied Ecology) the average useful life of heavy goods vehicles is five years. (3)

I make a prophecy that by 2024, 70 percent of diesel heavy goods vehicles will have been replaced by CNG/LNG heavy goods vehicles when the toll exemptions are extended. These new heavy goods vehicles can all be fuelled using biomethane from straw or waste products. (4) This alone would reduce emissions from transport by 45 percent. In the process, it would also create an infrastructure of high performance CNG and LNG filling stations, which in the end will also benefit car drivers.

This is a good example of how to achieve a big effect with little effort. More please, dear Andi!

## **Third demand: Give credit for CO<sub>2</sub> savings for the use of biofuels in fleet limits!**

Where passenger vehicles are concerned, electric cars are not necessarily cleaner than vehicles powered by combustion engines. It all depends on the quality of the fuel. Electric cars are classified as being emission-free, but that does not necessarily mean that they do not cause CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The electricity they use is still mainly generated using fossil fuels. This is not taken account of in so-called “Tank-to-Wheel” approaches. If the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions created by generating the electricity used in Germany’s electricity mix is taken into account, the “fuel” used for electric cars is responsible for emissions of between 65 and 75 g/km. On the other hand, a CNG vehicle powered by biomethane manufactured from straw or waste materials generates CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of only around 8 g/km.

I challenge politicians to allow the use of the “Well-to-Wheel” principle as a voluntary accreditation option. This permits the vehicle manufacturers to take account of the CO<sub>2</sub> savings from biofuels when calculating fleet limits when there is evidence of these being clear and proven. Otherwise the technology choice in the transport sector is just a theoretical one, because the current calculation system means that the manufacturers are practically forced to produce electric cars for the market in order to meet the fleet limits – at any price.

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(3) Source: <https://www.erneuerbar-mobil.de/sites/default/files/2018-09/Teilbericht%201%20O-Lkw-Technologievergleich-2018.pdf> (in German)

(4) The use of so-called second generation biofuels is proven to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 90 percent as well as reducing fine particle and nitrogen oxide emissions

My final demand is not directed at the politicians but to industry and its major trade associations:

#### **Fourth demand: Stop blocking progress!**

We cannot simply pass the buck on to the politicians. They are not the only ones responsible for the miserable situation we are in. The MWV, BDI, VDA, VDI, MEW/AFM, Uniti and the ADAC – all the largest industry associations and clubs have also made a negative contribution by not doing anything other than prevent any progress, whether their actions are direct or indirect. This has been clearly demonstrated in the case of the introduction of E10.

And shame on the BDI! For years it keeps its mouth shut, but now, as Mrs Merkel's days are numbered, President Dieter Kempf attacks her like a hyena. He should be ashamed of himself.

End the blockade! We will not make a single step forward in the next 30 years as long as every practical approach to finding a solution is strangled at birth by cowardice, comfort, personal career advancement and opposition lobbying. Climate change and the extreme conditions it creates will continue over that time.

It is time to stand up and be counted! Anyone who thinks that our dear politicians and the presidents of our industry associations can just carry on governing in the same way in the years ahead should take early retirement now. Time is running out! It should be clear that we need reliable, constructive and ambitious objectives in order to reach our climate protection objectives. We need solutions which are also ecologically sensible and can only be implemented when politicians and trade associations work together – for the world that our children will live in!

**Yours,**  
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