



Report on Wilton Park Conference WP863

WILTON PARK BRITISH-GERMAN FORUM 2007 CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: HOW?

Monday 9 – Friday 13 July 2007

1. This year's Forum tackled the topic 'Creating a Sustainable Future: How?' Much of the discussion focused around the impact which climate change will have on our future and what needs to be done to combat it. There was no doubt that climate change is a real problem for the planet although the group were keen to understand the science and question speakers about the longer-term predictions and implications.

Conclusions

2. In the final session the four discussion groups presented a number of points resulting from their discussions. They had not necessarily come to consensus on the issues but highlighted key issues raised.

3. The group felt that 'our generation' is the first generation that has the information that is now needed in order to act, and the moral obligation to act. As one group noted "the world is affected whether we like it or not." Others were less subtle in their language given the enormity of the effect and recognised the urgency for action.

What does a sustainable future mean?

4. One group provided the vision of a society where sustainability is embedded into the culture as second nature rather than an 'add-on'. Sustainability needs to be a collective global goal they argued, creating equitable development at both social and economic levels. As one group noted "we need to throw away the 'throw-away culture'".

5. In terms of energy use groups noted that we need to diversify away from fossil fuels, whether nuclear, biofuels or alternatives, and find alternative solutions using technology and adaptation for example carbon capture and storage (CCS).

6. Consumers have both the responsibility to 'do their bit' to help reduce climate change and ensure a sustainable future and the power to press governments and corporations for change. In terms of their responsibilities we are likely to have to adjust personal behaviour and need to be flexible to adapt to change. This will involve personal choices such as whether to fly abroad for holidays or not, or could

involve government intervention, through taxation to reduce flying, for example, or restricting the number of children women have.

7. However for consumers to make changes in behaviour they have to see the benefits and not be too inconvenienced. Governments and corporations have to get the messages right. There was some concern that consumers have been bombarded with messages about climate change and their carbon footprint and that this might now be a turn-off for 'turning-off', for instance they feel more disobliged to adapt behaviour to use less energy. Anyway, what can one individual achieve which would do anything to compensate for the enormous increase in greenhouse gases being emitted by China?

8. At the same time there is recognition that we have exported our 'carbon' emissions to China in order to have cheaper manufactured goods which maintain our 'feel-good' material lifestyles.

9. It was noted that "top companies are sustainable companies". Significant sums will need to be spent by companies (and governments) on research and development to find technical solutions to enhance sustainability.

What can Britain and Germany learn from one another

10. The group felt that Germany and the UK have much to learn from one another. The UK can learn from Germany about:

- a) recycling;
- b) renewables;
- c) regulation;
- d) green buildings;
- e) plastic bags ;
- f) public transport;
- g) embedding climate change issues in the curriculum.

11. Germany can learn from the UK about:

- a) marketing and advertising and campaigning - the UK is good at putting a positive spin on things, generating consumer enthusiasm, thinking about carbon accounts, setting frameworks, and political campaigns. Lessons can be learnt about how to keep climate change and sustainable development on the agenda permanently through better advertising yet without appearing to be "too preachy", how to generate it as a fashion issue through education and children's programmes;
- b) liberalising energy markets, reducing unfair subsidies and encouraging new technology;
- c) setting ambitious targets for climate change (the bill currently going through the British Parliament provides an example);
- d) improving policy making especially from joined-up government and widening consultations before federal and regional policies are set.

What can and should Britain and Germany do together within Europe and globally? How can they show leadership?

12. Suggestions include:

- a) make sustainability economically attractive through grants and tax incentives;
- b) strive to be better at achieving sustainability and combating climate change; competition can help ensure greater commitment and achievements;
- c) get and keep climate change as high as possible on the international political agenda;
- d) brace the world for the consequences of climate change (migration, water shortages, conflict etc);
- e) encourage incentives for business;
- f) develop contingency and adaptation plans;
- g) build economic and trade frameworks to prompt others to act; the tools of international diplomacy are needed to promote the cause.

13. There were question marks about whether a democracy can deliver sustainable development or whether, to achieve the best solutions, it has to be 'top down' and enforced.

14. Both countries can provide global leadership, but to do this they need ambitious goals. It was noted that the UK had already led by example with the Stern review. The relationship and personal chemistry between the two leaders, Gordon Brown and Angela Merkel, will be a critical factor in what the two countries can achieve together.

The European context

15. Both the UK and Germany have made considerable contributions within the European Union but:

- a) they need to keep the subject of combating climate change alive at a political level and work through the single market framework to ensure it remains competitive in relation to China, India and other emerging economies;
- b) EU countries should aim for greater carbon disclosure;
- c) the European emissions trading scheme (ETS) should be reviewed to ensure it is more equitable and use grants to develop technology etc.;
- d) EU institutions should take a lead, for example, in standard-setting etc.;
- e) The EU should aim to speak with one voice recognising the different strengths and comparative advantages of different member states.

16. At a global level Europe should press for international agreements on climate change and sustainability which should be robust, durable and fair. The UK and Germany can play a pivotal role both in the EU and G8 to achieve this.

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