Assemblée des Régions d'Europe
Assembly of European Regions
Versammlung der Regionen Europas
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Assemblea delle Regioni d'Europa

House of Commons – a short introduction

Topics:

1. **Fossil fuels versus Renewable energies**

The demand for energy has dramatically increased in the past decades, and it will grow even further and appallingly faster in the near future. It has become blatently obvious that our regions must use renewable energy sources if they want to satisfy our unstoppably higher energy needs. Since fossil fuels are rapidly running out, and it will take ages for them to get replenished, the arousing enthusiasm for unconventional types of energy seems perfectly understandable.

Renewables offer a multitude of advantages: they provide an unlimited source of energy, benefit in many countries from long run guaranteed prices and are not harmful to the environment. At least not to the same extent as coal burning plants... It is therefore not surprising that wind, solar power, biomass waste, hydropower and geothermal heat are slowly taking over the dirty King Coal, forcing it to step down.

But not all that shines is gold….

The antagonists of clean energy sources say that they are too expensive; they simply cannot get by without artificially deflated prices and are unable to compete in a free market (let's forget for a while that the latter still doesn't exist). Furthermore, as the technologies for extracting energy from sunlight, wind or biomass are rather new, they still stir up vivid discussion about their unpredictable lifecycle. After all, if we have spent three last centuries on learning how to extract coal, gas and oil, why don't we simply try to improve the existing techniques? We could expand on our research efforts regarding carbon filters or carbon underground storage. The argument about limited fossil fuels stocks is also easily rejected. The current state of the science do not allow us to predict with a high level of certainty that new oil reserves will not be found some day in the future. And the peak oil theory might anyway have been created by…yes, you got it right…. A big oil industry!

So, should we privilege renewables so much? Can fossil fuels get a second life? If you like speaking and have strong views on how political leaders should develop the energy sector in the future, don't hesitate and join our debate!

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2. No energy independence without nuclear energy?

Nuclear power has received increasing attention in the global debate over the world's energy future, which has prompted a new look at and new thinking about this source of energy. The debate is not over whether or not the world should "go nuclear," but rather whether the world should rely on increasingly more nuclear power to satisfy its energy needs.

This question does have far reaching consequences: In the short and medium term, energy independence cannot be achieved by relying on renewable energies alone. So is the future in nuclear energy and energy independence or rather in avoiding the nuclear option and promoting energy interdependence?

3. Climate change – is it man made or a natural phenomenon?

Though there is growing consensus on the idea that human activity affects climate, several experts claim that natural variability is being underestimated.

On one hand climate change sceptics argue that computer models are oversimplified and that climate change is a political tool using alarmism rather than scientific evidence. Sceptics not only challenge the validity of findings but also the data used for elaborating forecasts as well as theories of global warming, some of them stating for instance that carbon dioxide is not a pollutant.

On the other hand that humans are causing global warming is the position of the Academies of Science from 19 countries plus many scientific organisations that study climate science. More specifically, 97% of climate scientists actively publishing climate papers endorse the consensus position.

The issue is crucial for politicians as for citizens insofar that determining the impact of human activity on climate determines the margin of action for mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

4. Europeans will not start a more sustainable life if that means they will have less comfort.

Technical solutions can only to a certain degree solve the problem of climate change. If we cannot raise awareness among the population and convince them of the need to adopt an energy saving culture, the goal of establishing a low-carbon or carbon-neutral society cannot be achieved. But are all the awareness-raising efforts to change human behaviour really working or are we resistant to them when this implies a reduction of our comfort?