

Title:	Welcome address
Speaker:	Dr. Urban Rid, Director General Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nuclear Safety and Nature Conservation
Occasion:	Expert Workshop on the Mediterranean Solar Plan in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean
Venue:	Hotel Park Inn, Berlin, 28 October 2008

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentleman,

I am glad to have the opportunity to welcome you to this workshop on the Solar Plan within the Union for the Mediterranean.

The workshop is an element of the initiative for the Solar Plan started jointly by France and Germany within the Union for the Mediterranean. There will be other events, in particular a conference in Paris by the end of November. The aim of these events is

- to push the general idea and the vision of the Solar Plan,
- to make it more concrete,
- and, finally, to make it happen.

In the last weeks, the international crisis of the finance system dominated world politics. However, we should not neglect other issues which are of fundamental importance for the future of mankind and for the economic well being of our nations. Climate policy and energy policy are such issues.

Energy is the basis for economic development. The global demand for energy is rising continuously. This reflects the growth of our economies. The other side of the coin, however, is the growing problem of climate change. The challenge is to meet our rising energy demands without jeopardising our planet. Without any doubt, renewable energies will have to play a key role in this context.

There is a second reason for pushing renewable energies. The resources of oil, gas and coal are limited. We are depleting these resources at a furious rate. It is obvious that this cannot go on forever.

I will not discuss whether we already had "peak oil", whether it will be in five, ten or twenty years. That is not the point. The point is: Some day, it will happen. And we should be prepared for it.

Against this background, Germany pursues an ambitious renewable energy policy.

- Ten years ago, renewable energies contributed little more than 2 percent to our primary energy consumption. Last year, it was 6.7 percent – three times more than in 1998.
- Within the same period, we increased the contribution of renewables to our electricity consumption from 4.8 percent to more than 14 percent.

And this is not the end of the story. The increasing use of renewable energies follows a long term strategy with clear objectives and timelines. In the electricity sector, for example, we will double the contribution of renewables until 2020. By then, 30 percent of our electricity consumption will be based on renewable energies. And in 2050, renewable energies shall contribute 50% to our primary energy consumption.

In order to reach these long term goals, we have to think about imports of electricity from renewable energies. One of the most promising prospects is electricity from concentrated solar power plants in southern Europe and northern Africa. And this is the reason, why – from the beginning – we supported the idea of a Solar Plan within the Union for the Mediterranean.

Germany has supported the technologies for using concentrated solar power (CSP) for a long time. In the last four years, we spent almost 25 Mio. € on research in this field. The most important German research institute in the field of CSP, the German

Aerospace Center (DLR), is one of the leading players world wide. And we also have several firms which are active in this field and quite successful.

To be sure, concentrated solar power is not the only promising technology for using renewable energies around the Mediterranean Sea. There is also a high potential for wind energy and photovoltaics. The Solar Plan includes these as well.

On behalf of the German Environment Ministry, the German Aerospace Center has thoroughly analysed the potential for using renewables around the Mediterranean Sea. Three studies have been published in close cooperation with many players in the countries covered. The results will be summarised in one of the first presentations today.

The studies confirm in particular that there is a huge potential for solar energy in Northern Africa. This potential is not only big enough to deliver energy for the northern African countries. It would enable them also to export substantial amounts of electricity.

And here we are at the heart of the Solar Plan. If we want to exploit this huge potential of renewable energy around the Mediterranean Sea, we have to do a lot of work. It is one thing to have vision. But it is quite another thing to make it happen.

And that is what the idea to work out a Solar Plan is all about: to make it happen.

To be sure: The vision of producing large amounts of electricity from renewables in northern Africa is a long term vision. We should be realistic about this. There are huge amounts of money necessary and there are other obstacles to overcome, for example with regard to grid expansion.

However, if we want to make it happen in the long run, we have to start today.

A lot of questions have to be answered:

- Are the northern African countries interested in exporting electricity from renewable energies? Or would they prefer to use it themselves?
- How could we transport substantial amounts of electricity
 - within northern Africa,
 - between northern Africa and Europe
 - and within Europe?

What is necessary to enable the grids to accomplish this task?

- And above all: How can we finance the necessary investments? What are the mechanisms needed to create sufficient incentives for private investments in, for example, concentrated solar power plants and grids?

These are some of the issues we have to deal with today, tomorrow and in the following months.

I already mentioned that it were France and Germany which started the initiative for the Solar Plan. From the beginning, however, the idea was to get as many countries as possible involved. Therefore, I am glad that many countries are participating in this workshop.

I wish you interesting discussions, good results and also two nice days in Berlin.

Thank you very much for your attention!