ISRAEL

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ISRAELI CLIMATE POLICY: ENERGY SECURITY IN THE SERVICE OF CLIMATE PROTECTION

The main symptoms of climate change in Israel are a drop in rainfall and an increase in extreme weather events. This densely populated, arid country is characterised by continuous population and economic growth, resulting in ever-increasing energy consumption.

Since 1987, the Ben-Gurion National Solar Energy Center in the Negev Desert has been researching technology to harness solar energy – such as parabolic reflector systems.

CLIMATE POLICY MEASURES

The year 2009 saw a change in Israeli climate policy. At the climate summit in Copenhagen, Israel pledged to cut its projected rise in greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020.[1] It subsequently adopted a series of measures, the most striking of which was the National Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Plan, which involves initiatives in the areas of energy efficiency, green building and environmental education. In addition, in 2011 the cabinet reaffirmed its decision from 2009 to source ten percent of Israel's electricity from renewable energies by 2020. An interim goal of five percent was set for 2014.

1 | The OECD observes that even if Israel managed to cut the forecast level of greenhouse gas emissions for 2020 by 20 percent, this would still mean more greenhouse gas emissions overall as the target is only to reduce the increase.

In March 2013, Netanyahu won a third term in office. The new minister for environmental protection, Amir Peretz (HaTnua), has shown great commitment to his role and, like his predecessor Gilad Erdan (Likud), has a reputation for being a "doer". In 2013 nearly half of Knesset seats were won by new members. Many of them have an open-minded attitude towards climate policy issues.

Introducing sustainable climate policy in Israel is, however, a difficult task, as Israeli political culture is very much shaped by a short-term, improvised approach to trouble-shooting. This mindset has its roots in the collective experience of being a nation of immigrants. In Israel, it is not only the individual who struggles to get through day-to-day life; the state as a whole must fight to survive.

Climate protection often falls by the wayside when up against issues related to security and financial policy. Over the last few years, immediate security threats (attacks from Islamist groups from the Gaza Strip, increasingly frequent and often fatal attacks on Israeli citizens in the West Bank, the volatile situation in the surrounding Arab states and Iran's nuclear programme), the new budget adopted in 2013 and struggles for greater social justice have dominated public debate and made it difficult to draw attention to the importance of a coherent climate policy. These priorities are also reflected in local media coverage, which rarely addresses climate policy issues.

The new national budget adopted in 2013 saw numerous cuts, which also affected climate protection. The suspension of the National Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Plan and deferral of further funding until 2016 was a serious setback in the fight against climate change. According to calculations made by the Ministry for Environmental Protection, the programme could have cut annual greenhouse emissions by 450,000 tonnes by the end of the decade. Overall, levels of state spending for environmental and climate protection are far below those of other departments, such as defence.

Another key problem facing environmental and climate protection is that responsibility for this area is shared across many different ministries. As a result, climate-related initiatives often lack coherence. An integrated and comprehensive strategy to adapt to

and decelerate climate change is required if Israel is to boost its capacities in this area and ensure that its actions have an impact on the consequences of climate change.

Following the commitments made in Copenhagen in 2009, progress has been achieved in the area of environmental legislation. However, one of the main criticisms levelled at Israel is that it has been too slow to implement these measures on all levels.[2]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Public debate on energy-related issues in Israel is mainly linked to economic and security policy matters. Being energy-independent is a key geostrategic goal for the Jewish state because the majority of the energy-exporting nations are hostile to Israel.

While the Israeli Ministry for Environmental Protection and the large number of environmental NGOs active in the field are working towards linking energy policy and climate protection, the Israeli public is still not very aware of the relationship between these two areas. Among other factors, this is because Israel's greenhouse gas emissions make up less than one percent of emissions worldwide and thus play a relatively insignificant role on a global scale – even if the country does have a high per capita energy consumption. Any cuts in Israel's emissions would have only a negligible impact on global climate change.

Numerous government initiatives aim to reduce the country's energy dependency at the national and international levels, particularly when it comes to the use of crude oil.[3] These initiatives involve a variety of projects that also strive to cut its carbon footprint. Israel's highly innovative high-tech and clean-tech sectors play an important role in these endeavours. However, many environmental activists are critical of Israel because – although it ranks among the world leaders in these fields – it mainly exports its innovative solutions instead of putting them to good use in Israel itself.[4]

The main reason behind the drop in greenhouse gas emissions in Israel is its increasing reliance on natural gas to generate energy. In April 2013, the country started drilling for natural gas in the Tamar gas field off its coast. Israel's gradual transition to natural gas (away from coal, crude oil and diesel) for the production of energy is helping reduce the amount of greenhouse gas it emits. As a result, Israel has improved its carbon footprint since the middle of the last decade while also halting the rise of its greenhouse gas emissions.[5]

However, this ostensibly positive development may have a negative impact on the promotion of renewable energies and could also hinder the development of not only a sustainable energy policy, but also one that ensures independence in the long term. As 40 percent of offshore natural gas reserves are designated for export, Israel will be able to rely on its natural gas supplies for around the next 30 years, according to current calculations.[6] If it fails to find additional natural gas or oil reserves and does not develop new technologies to efficiently generate alternative energies within this period, Israel will once again become dependent on imports. The Israeli government is going to fall short of its interim goal of generating five percent of electricity from renewable energies by 2014. In fact, current figures show that the country will not even produce two percent of its power from renewables by the end of this year.[7]

While public debate on energy matters in Israel rarely addresses climate change, there is no doubt that Israelis associate the rise in extreme weather events such as periods of drought and severe storms with climate change. The severe snow storm in December 2013 and the devastating forest fire on Mount Carmel in December 2010, which spread across a wide area due to persistent drought, were clear signs of the need to take action to adapt to the consequences of climate change. A political process has been under way in this area for several years, which culminated in the Ministry for Environmental Protection developing

2 | Cf. OECD, *OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: Israel 2011. Highlights*, p. 1, http://www.oecd.org/env/country-reviews/48962516.pdf [28 July 2014].
3 | Cf. Sharon Udasin, "Prime Minister's 2nd annual contest for oil substitutes is underway", *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 April 2014, http://bit.ly/1nHFa5J [28 July 2014].
4 | Cf. Sharon Udasin, "Nitzan Horowitz to represent Israel at US Senate climate change summit", *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 February 2014, http://bit.ly/1k6WSzr [28 July 2014].
5 | Cf. n. 2, p. 6.
6 | Cf. Shmuel Even and Oded Eran, "The Natural Gas Revolution in Israel", Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (eds.), *Strategic Survey for Israel 2013–2014*, Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv, 2013, pp. 189–203, here: p. 199, http://inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=6479 [28 July 2014].
7 | Information from an employee of the Public Utility Authority (PUA) of 15 May 2014. The PUA is responsible for the implementation of government policy and the award of renewable energy licencing.

a national climate change adaptation programme. The Israeli government's inter-ministerial committee is set to submit its recommendations soon.[8]

ISRAEL AND MULTILATERAL CLIMATE POLICY

Israel is affected by climate change, yet can do little to mitigate its impact. As a result, its commitment to this issue on the global stage can be interpreted as a desire to be part of the OECD[9] and thus forge stronger ties with the Western world.[10] Furthermore, climate change-related measures taken to cut greenhouse gas emissions aim to boost the Israeli clean-tech market and reduce dependency on energy exporters – thus minimising the country's strategic risks.[11]

While local media covered the UN climate conferences, there has been little mention of topics such as Germany's energy transition or European climate and energy policy. It has mainly been European organisations and German foundations that have broached these issues.[12]

CONCLUSION

Motivated by geostrategic and economic concerns, Israel is striving to boost its energy independence by focusing on the exploration of new natural gas and crude oil reserves as well as by promoting the use of renewable energies and encouraging energy efficiency. The fact that progress on these latter areas of focus will bolster the Israeli clean-tech industry while also potentially cutting greenhouse gas emissions is viewed as a positive side effect.

A key motivation behind Israel's efforts in the area of sustainable energy policy is to improve its position in the international community and become a more integral part of the western world. It is therefore the job of the European Union and particularly the Federal Republic of Germany to remind Israel of its commitments and responsibility to international climate protection and to help the country reach its targets through bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The clean-tech industry offers particularly promising options for economic and scientific partnerships with Israel.

Modular and swivelling collectors generate both heat and electricity for homes.

8 | Cf. Israel Ministry of Environmental Protection, *Israel Environment Bulletin* 40, 03 / 2014, p. 19, http://sviva.gov.il/English/ResourcesandServices/Publications/Bulletin/Documents/Bulletin-Vol40-March2014.pdf [28 July 2014].

9 | Israel was accepted into the OECD in 2010.

10 | It is characteristic that the suspension of the National Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Plan was criticised in particular for its negative impact on the international standing of Israel.

11 | Cf. "Environmentalists decry Israeli treasury's plan to freeze greenhouse-gas mitigation plan", *Haaretz*, 8 May 2014.

12 | Cf. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Israel publication, http://kas.de/israel/de/publications [28 July 2014] also on "Energy Security and Energy Strategies in Europe and Israel", 2012.