

REGIONALPROGRAMM

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“Who's got the power ?

The Future of energy in the Arabian Gulf“

THE THIRD „DUBAI DEBATES“ ABOUT THE FUTURE OF ENERGY

Sustainable, green and cheap: that is how the energy of the future should be, even in countries, where oil flows in abundance. To stress their seriousness about “going green” the Gulf States have taken a series of measures to take first steps into a green future. First photovoltaic systems and moduls have been built and are feeding electricity into the grid. The Gulf States are working feverishly to turn the “solar gold” – solar energy - into usable energy. But just how complex the energy question really is became clear during the most recent “Dubai Debates” with top-level energy-experts. “Who's got the power? The future of energy in the Arabian Gulf” was the topic of the third “Dubai Debates” which the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Program Gulf-States in partnership with the organization dubaidebates.com and CNN international had organized Around 80 visitor followed the invitation – many of them were leading national and international analysts and journalists, as well as students. Listeners and participants of the panel tweeted the most pointed outcomes live, reaching many thousand Twitter users (# DD3).

Michael Peel, Middle East correspondent of the Financial Times, the British energy expert and author Robin Mills and Middle East editor Kate Dourian engaged in the panel discussion which was hosted by Mishaal Al Gergawi, who is known through his columns in the UAE daily "Gulf News".

The debate was supplemented by a video contribution by the popular Danish climate scientist Bjørn Lomborg. The controversial discussion was divided into five segments, highlight of which can be found on www.dubaidebates.com. The video are also marketed by the website CNN.com.

The debate kicked-off by addressing the question which alternative energy sources the Gulf countries could tap into once oil and gas have been exploited. Although a major oil exporter, the United Arab Emirates are trying to break new ground in the field of energy and are leading in the promotion of sustainable energies amongst the Gulf-Sates. The UAE aims to cover seven percent of its energy demand through renewable energy sources by the year 2020. Undoubtedly an ambitious goal for a state that has been completely dependent on fossil fuels.

Although the oil resources will last approximately for the next 100 years, the UAE initiated new projects such as Masdar City. Masdar City is a completely self-sufficient city outside the town, which produces neither carbon dioxide nor waste. These projects showcase the country's commitment to sustainability.

The transformation from “black gold” to “solar gold” generated by the sun would certainly take some years, explained Kate Dourian. “Why shouldn't we have an oil based economy in this part of the world?,” she asked rhetorically, especially as the wealth in this region is rooted purely in powerful oil resources.

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The will to change is certainly present, but pragmatic considerations also play a decisive role, Kate Dourian appealed. Economics considerations and energy needs are not to be neglected. While the use of alternative energy in Europe is based on green movements, the approach of the Gulf States is a much rather pragmatic cost-benefit analyses. In this context it is interesting that the largest oil exporters suffer from energy shortage, which massively threatens the economic development of their countries. A rapid population growth, rising living standards and rapid economic growth over the last decade have led to a considerable increase in energy consumption across all Gulf States. The current energy demand of the UAE alone, for instance, is estimated to climb from now 16,000 to about 40,000 megawatts by the year 2020. Over the last years, maximum power production repeatedly failed to satisfy the general demand and narrow passes have led local energy networks to collapse.

Therefore, Abu Dhabi has submitted plans to ensure energy supply by building nuclear power plants - at a time when Germany has decided to phase out nuclear energy completely. The panel agreed that the disaster of Fukushima has led Western countries to reconsider their energy policies, whereas the catastrophe left only little impression on the Arab World.

Earlier this year, Germany was the first industrialized nation in the world to decide to completely pull out of nuclear power by the end of 2020. Robin Mills rated Germany's radical decision as rather critical, conceded, however, that it's will to push renewable energy sources could serve as a model for the Arab world. "Solar energy makes sense in those places where the sun always shines," Mills said. Peel agreed: "Here is the place for solar energy. The sun is here!" But without the political will renewable energies would not have any future, neither in the Gulf Region nor elsewhere.

According to the panel, a clear answer to the question regarding nuclear power is not

that simple. In the light of Fukushima and the Iranian energy policy nuclear power remains a touchy subject in general. Whereas the UAE underlined the peaceful use of nuclear power, Iran, on the contrary, has already been working on the development of nuclear weapons. Arab politicians fear the hostile attitude of Iranian's President Ahmedineschad towards Western countries. They are also afraid that Iran's nuclear ambitions could threaten the stability within the Gulf region.

One of the major challenges in energy and environmental policy in the next few decades is the increasing urbanization. By 2030 almost 70 percent of the Arab population will live in cities - under severe environmental conditions. Energy demand will rise by up to 40 percent, 90 percent of which in developing countries alone. Already today per capita electricity consumption in the UAE is ten times higher than the world average. Additionally, water consumption is much higher than anywhere else. In this context, DubaiDebates host Mishaal Al Gergawi posed the question as to how a rethinking within the Emirati population regarding environmental issues could be facilitated. A member of the audience pointed out that UAE energy and water consumption policy was full of contradictions. He criticized the enormous amounts of water wasted on tourist attractions such as fountains or water parcs. Moreover, he identified the "refrigerator-like temperatures" in hotels and public buildings, as another example of waste of energy in the UAE. Consequently, there is a lack of a so-called "environmental awareness". An Emirati student suggested how to encourage people to act ecologically. According to him, subsidies for water, electricity and petrol should be abolished and be accounted for real market prices. Instead, these subsidies could be distributed to social causes. As a consequence society would think twice about energy, their spending and lifestyle.

"DubaiDebates" is a debate series, where leading experts, journalists, opinion leaders, politicians and activists discuss regional and international issues. It was launched in

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February 2011 and is now the only public debate forum in the Gulf region, which is not funded by an Arab government. During the first "DubaiDebate" the socio-political upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia and the role of online networks in this context had been discussed. In the second debate experts like Dalia Mogahed, Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, and Tarik Yousef, CEO Silatech Qatar, discussed issues that arose "After The Arab Awakening: Opportunities and Challenges for a New Arab World."

The forthcoming fourth "DubaiDebate" will be held on Sunday, December 18th, at the Dubai Knowledge Village Conference Center. The role of women in the Arab spring will be in the very centre of the debate.