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“sun21” transatlantic record attempt begins

In the twilight of Monday evening, 16 October, the transatlantic21 association's solar catamaran left Basel en route for its transatlantic record attempt to New York. A short time earlier, Federal Councillor and Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey had officially christened the “sun21” with Rhine spring water. 400 invited guests and numerous passers-by waved farewell from the Mittlere Brücke. The Foreign Minister, together with Ralph Lewin, a member of the cantonal government of Basel, and Paul Steele, chief operating officer of WWF International, all attended to wish the crew a safe journey.

On Monday evening around 6:00 pm – accompanied by suitably festive music – Mrs Calmy-Rey poured a bottle of Rhine spring water over the “sun21” nameplate that had just been unveiled on the solar catamaran's stern. During the naming ceremony, Mrs Calmy-Rey talked in some detail about the need for alternatives to non-renewable energies, especially oil. "The exploitation of fossil energy carriers continues to be a cause and a focus of wars," she said. She promised that the “sun21” enterprise would receive her full support.

"Your arrival in New York will be an important signal that it is both worthwhile and possible to adopt a forward-thinking approach to energy and the resources of our planet," was her message to the crew of the “sun21” just prior to the official naming ceremony. As "brave pioneers", they were about to "establish confidence in a key technology of the future" and as "ambassadors for our country", they were demonstrating that "Switzerland is an ideal place in which to carry out research and a first-rate partner for scientific collaboration".

For Ralph Lewin, member of the cantonal government of Basel, the city built on the bend in the Rhine was "a worthy starting place for the solar catamaran's journey". The canton does indeed have a very progressive energy policy and many Basel-based

companies have already shown themselves to be very open-minded as regards energy policy.

"Basel is the pilot region for the 2000 Watt Society, and the city's administration is becoming increasingly conscious of its responsibilities and of its role as a model for others," says Lewin. Energy provider IWB is investing in the construction of the first commercially viable geothermal power station here, and its management is seeking to completely neutralise its climate gas emissions. In his official capacity, Ralph Lewin wished good luck to all who were about to sail in the "sun21" on its first leg along the Rhine to Rotterdam.

Skipper Michel Thonney outlined to the assembled company the critical aspects of the Atlantic crossing that the solar boat would undertake from Seville in November. He was personally looking forward to the route between 16 and 14 degrees north latitude and the warm climate of the tropics. "We are expecting winds of between force three and five and waves up to three metres high," said the skipper, who considers these conditions normal for the winter season.

After completing 7000 nautical miles, the sun21 is expected to arrive in New York at 6:00 pm on 8 May 2007. "All thanks to the most important guest on our trip," said Thonney. "The sun, of course!"

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Photographic material of the naming ceremony from: www.transatlantic21.ch/medien

You will find additional information and media documentation at the same address.