

Ten Years of SUN21

**Dr. Christoph Eymann, Councillor of Canton Basel-City and co-founder of sun21,
speaking on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of sun21 on 15 June 2007**

(the spoken text takes precedence)

Retrospectives are not without certain dangers. After all, those who dwell on the past run the risk of paying too little attention to the future. And whereas it is only right and proper that we learn the lessons of history and engage in some retrospective self-criticism from time to time, it is also the sacred duty of all active politicians to have their sights trained firmly on the future.

As the occasion of this speech is a tenth anniversary, however, I would nevertheless like to devote a few minutes to the task implied by its title. Which means asking such questions as what it was that motivated us to found sun21 ten years ago and what has been the secret of sun21's success and hence the reason for our presence here today.

Well perhaps the most crucial factor has been the dedication of sun21's founders, of people such as Martin Vosseler, Andreas Nidecker and others who may not have belonged to this nucleus.

Both the aforementioned men had, and still have, a vision.

But what they also had was a very clear idea of how this vision could one day be made a reality – and that within the foreseeable future, too.

Both had, and still have, an extensive network of contacts to experts in alternative energy sources and power engineering worldwide.

Both had, and still have, a firm grasp of the state of the art and of the political activities currently under way in this field both in Switzerland and abroad.

Both had, and still have, the ability to approach people directly, to break down barriers and to focus on what binds us together rather than on what keeps us apart.

Andreas Nidecker and Martin Vosseler first approached me more than ten years ago, when I was still director of the local business association of Basel-City. They came to me to talk about the "Business and the Environment" campaign I had launched some years previously in hopes of nurturing a more professional approach to the conservation of resources and protection of the environment on the part of local industry. In the weeks that followed, the three of us met several times in order to forge plans and sometimes just to indulge in flights of fancy. The enthusiasm of both men was certainly infectious, for despite the reticence and scepticism of the cantonal government, we nevertheless succeeded in winning its approval of a guest list to the first sun21 event which included such illustrious names as the Swiss President, several members of the Federal Council and a number of high-ranking cantonal politicians as well. True, not many of these people came; but at least the canton itself was now convinced of the potential such an international energy forum would have – a commitment borne out by the generous funding it provided.

After hearing this story, you will probably agree that one reason for our success has been our forging of new alliances that not so long ago would have been unthinkable: in this case two dedicated doctors, both of them well versed in energy issues, a cantonal councillor who in the early days of sun21 was a relative newcomer to the scene, and the director of the local business association. What the four of us then did was to try to give concrete shape and form

to the countless different ideas then circulating with the aim of eventually being able to use our own particular remit and powers to put these into practice.

I'm pleased to say that this gave rise to more than just the sun21 forums. It also gave rise to a new energy philosophy for the city of Basel, a philosophy which has since then informed the city's energy and environmental policies.

Not that I intend to use this retrospective to bask in our own glory and to speak in glowing terms of how well Basel has done compared with most Swiss cities. As laudable as these achievements may be, what, to my mind, are even more interesting than the successes of the past, are the possibilities that were *not* pursued, the opportunities that were missed. The point is not to find someone to pin the blame on, nor is it to imply that I, or anyone else, knew better all along. On the contrary. The point is to learn from past mistakes and to ensure that whatever went wrong, whatever was less than perfect or wanting in some other way will be handled better and more effectively next time.

What we have not been able to do these past ten years is to raise people's awareness of the importance of energy conservation.

What we have not been able to do these past ten years is to motivate, or even force, policymakers at federal level to adopt more courageous policies in the interests of greater energy efficiency and energy conservation.

What we have not been able to do these past ten years is to make our university and our university of applied sciences a competence centre of international standing for energy policy and energy issues.

What we have not been able to do these past ten years is to attract a cluster of new businesses involved in the planning and production of renewable energy sources and products to promote energy efficiency.

What we have not been able to do these past ten years is to make Switzerland a world leader in a field which is crucial to our future development.

The list is certainly not exhaustive. Not that I wish to spread a sense of doom and gloom. I would much rather this acknowledgment of past failures spurred us on to try even harder in future.

Because if we want to have every rooftop that can take it fitted with a solar panel, if we want our cars to have bodies that are not just brightly coloured, but also capable of generating electricity which can then be fed into the grid at specially designed car parks, if we want our buildings to become not only self-sufficient, but capable of contributing any surplus energy they generate into the grid and if we want to make more effective use of wood and biomass as a source of energy in future, then we must become more resolute! Because what our policymakers, administrators, educators need most is the anchorage and ability to put ideas into practice that such committed experts as Andreas Nidecker, Martin Vosseler, Markus Real, Ruedi Rechsteiner, Daniela Schlettwein, Pierre Fornallaz, Gallus Cadonau and others can provide.

It is time for us to aim beyond the confines of our own canton. It is time for us to develop a sense of purpose, even if the first consequence of this will be to expose the discrepancy – especially at federal level – between what we are calling for and the facts on the ground. Doubtless some will use this discrepancy to pour scorn on the ideas and standards we here in Basel are advocating. But that should not deter us. The idea itself is so persuasive that it is bound to win out in the end. And it is our job to ensure that this victory can be enjoyed before it is too late. The resistance has certainly lessened over the past decade. Far more political

parties now have sustainability firmly enshrined in their manifestos than was the case ten years ago. That the mood is still dangerously volatile is nevertheless apparent from the debate we have witnessed during these past few months on how best to make up the shortfall in Switzerland's electricity supply. The solutions proposed diverge so radically that we have every reason to fear becoming embroiled in years of bickering over which approach is the 'right' one. Which makes me regret all the more that one idea that did not win cantonal approval was that of bringing together the expertise available at national level and convening an energy summit or roundtable discussion involving all the various interested parties. Some ideas, unfortunately, are rejected not on their own merits, but on account of the party which floated them. That it is high time we overcame this kind of party-political polarization doubtless goes without saying.

The conditions prevailing today are very different from what they were ten years ago. For at least now, the scientific reports published by the United Nations and other supranational institutions can be expected to provoke a reaction at national level. Public awareness of the problem has certainly increased in many states and the likelihood of being able to go ahead with courageous solutions to our energy problems is much greater now than it once was. What is needed above all else is the will to do this.

Why doesn't Switzerland convene an international energy summit in Basel?

Why doesn't Switzerland call for the creation of a worldwide fund that would enable emerging markets to avoid making the same mistakes that the industrialized nations have been making these past few decades?

Why doesn't Switzerland provide funding in the form of loans to beef up the research and development being done in this field?

Why doesn't Switzerland draft intercantonal standards which would help sort out the pros and cons of prohibitions or of forcing people by law to install solar panels or would at least set binding standards of energy efficiency?

These examples are but a pointer to the many issues that will, and indeed must, concern us in future years too.

As people throughout the ages have learned time and again – usually at their own expense –, a threat from the outside invariably leads to greater cohesion and solidarity on the inside. The threat now facing our planet from the outside is one of our own making. And the name of that threat is climate change. Although, to be fair, the problem is not so much the climate as the people who live in it. Perhaps you are familiar with the rather macabre joke currently in circulation which drives this point home: The planets are having a friendly chat, in the course of which Mars politely inquires after Earth's well-being. Poor Earth replies that she has homo sapiens and consequently is not doing so well. To which the sympathetic Mars responds: "Don't worry, Earth! That'll disappear of its own accord."

Naturally, we would prefer it if Earth were to learn to cope with the homo sapiens afflicting her. And surely we owe as much to our children, and to our children's children, too. The goals themselves are known; how to achieve them is also to a large extent common knowledge. So what we need now are new alliances with which to tackle the tasks ahead. And this, honoured members and friends of the Factor 4 Club and sun21, is where you come in. For you know what has to be done, which is why you are so important to us as opinion leaders and multipliers in our common cause. We need you with all your knowledge and all your powers of persuasion, just as we need like-minded people we can count on at local level as well. We all know what needs to be done and we all know that it brooks no delay. It is my dearest hope, therefore, that ten years from now, we will be able to look back on some courageous leaps

forward, made possible in no small way by the initiative that led to the founding of sun21 in the first place. I not only hope, however, but am firmly convinced that ten years from now, we will be speak proudly of all that we have accomplished in the first twenty years of sun21.