

EVENT REPORT
THE CLIMATE NETWORK PANEL DISCUSSION

Transatlantic solutions for a low-carbon economy: Are regional initiatives the best hope for U.S. action?

On 7 November 2011, the Heinrich Böll Foundation EU Office and the [German Marshall Fund of the United States](#) (GMF) co-hosted a panel debate at the Representation of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) to the European Union. The debate aimed to create a discussion about the latest developments in U.S. climate and energy policy as well as the future opportunities for progressive climate and energy policies at the regional and state level on both sides of the Atlantic. The ongoing financial crisis in Europe and high unemployment in the United States are crowding out climate change from the political agenda. The current opposition of the U.S. Congress to climate policy and to campaigns that question the climate crisis make it difficult to win support for policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and spur the deployment of renewable energy. Nevertheless, transatlantic cooperation remains the best way to identify and implement solutions for a low-carbon economy.

The event was part of the [Climate Network](#) programme and served as the release of the publication [Sharing Solutions: Transatlantic Cooperation for a Low-Carbon Economy](#). The speakers were Vicki Arroyo, Director of the [Georgetown Climate Center](#), Washington, DC, and Artur Runge-Metzger, Director for International and Climate Strategy at the European Commission's [Directorate-General for Climate Action](#), Frank Groneberg, Manager of the [Rodenäs Community Solar Park](#) in Schleswig-Holstein, Germany, and Thomas Legge, GMF Senior Programme Officer. Ms. Babette Winter from the NRW Representation opened the event and Claude Weinber, Director of the Heinrich Böll Foundation European Union, moderated the debate.



The central question to the panel was if bottom-up initiatives were the best hope for a transition towards a low-carbon economy in the U.S. As an ambitious and binding global climate regime will not be concluded in the short-run, there is a growing need to lead by example and to enhance a parallel process to the international climate negotiations. For instance, Germany's most populous and most economically powerful state, North Rhine-Westphalia, aims to move the region to the cutting edge of progressive climate action by adopting a regional Climate Protection Act. A

promising model on the local level is the community based ownership of renewable energy. This is based upon the idea of effectively involving the local population in the construction and the operation of wind or solar parks, thus trying to achieve acceptance among affected citizens. Policy regulations, such as the German Renewable Energy Sources Act with its feed-in tariff, facilitate the development of such projects.

Ms. Arroyo pointed out that climate actions in the U.S. certainly have to cope with many challenges (in particular at the federal level), but there are also a number of regional activities in place which demonstrate that the U.S. should not be underestimated in its effort to tackle climate change. California does not wait for the Environmental Protection Agency but moves forward with GHG regulations at the state level. The [Western Climate Initiative](#) aims to implement emissions trading policies to tackle climate change with a regional cap-and-trade programme. A significant number of states in the U.S. in addition have Climate Action Plans. While such bottom-up initiatives at the state and regional levels are important and can have a cumulative effect on the federal level, Mr. Runge-Metzger highlighted the need of meaningful federal action in the U.S. in order to avoid fragmentation and to spur the international climate debate.

From the European side, Mr. Runge-Metzger expressed the need for Europe to go ahead in the implementation and improvement of its climate legislation and to produce concrete results in order to continue to be a global leader on climate issues. At the same time, the positive impacts of progressive climate action in terms of economic development, job creation, energy independence, security aspects and air quality should be emphasised. The panelists discussed how the EU could cooperate with state and regional initiatives like the new Californian emissions trading system even in the absence of a U.S. federal cap-and-trade programme.