

Heliosthana 2020: a virtual Mediterranean island nation takes the right steps towards a sustainable energy future.¹

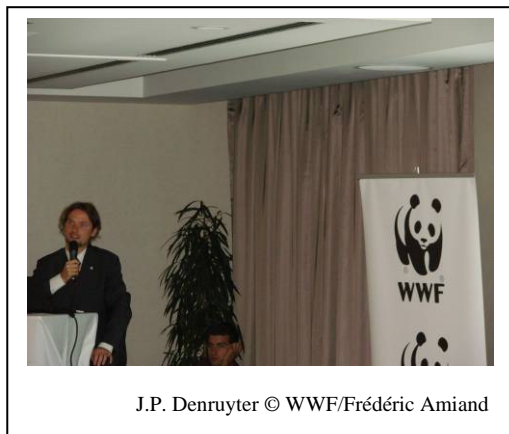
Event² Report by Jean-Philippe Denruyter

The Mediterranean Solar Plan, the Desertec Industrial Initiative and other grand sustainable energy plans have been proposed for the countries of the Mediterranean Region. Heliosthana, a keen partner of these initiatives, has introduced energy reforms to create an enabling framework for investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy.



Heliosthana Tea Reception © WWF/Frédéric Amiand

Jean-Philippe Denruyter, WWF International and special advisor to Heliosthana, gave an introductory speech about the Mediterranean energy context. He highlighted that the region was still highly fossil-fuel dependent and with a growing energy consumption.



J.P. Denruyter © WWF/Frédéric Amiand

This uncomfortable cocktail is heavily affecting countries' public budget. On the other hand, the region has a huge solar and wind energy potential, technologies to tap these potentials are available and costs are rapidly decreasing. Large plans have been made up, for instance through the political initiative Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP), the industrial initiative Desertec, and the financial initiative Clean Technology Fund (CTF.).

¹ «Heliosthana, a Mediterranean sustainable energy country» <http://www.boell.eu/web/288-586.html>¹

² The event that introduced the concept and publication of Heliosthana took place on 29 June 2010.

But these plans will only succeed if they come in parallel with energy reforms. For instance, fossil energy is still heavily subsidized and renewable energy does not benefit from a stable long-term support in the region. Also, energy intensity in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean is still very high. It did not really improve between 1990 and 2004. Finally, several reforms are needed at the institutional, policy and legislative level.

Jean-Philippe also believed that the MSP and other regional energy plans would need to highlight more their several benefits for the people from the Mediterranean region and Europe, in order to garner more support.

He cited Heliosthana as an example for the region. The country has been a front-runner in terms of positive energy reforms since 2010 and up to today, in 2021. It is for this reason that WWF and Heinrich Boll Stiftung are partnering with Heliosthana. *Each Mediterranean country should follow Heliosthana's example and implement its own solar plan!*

Adel Mourtada, Prime Minister of Heliosthana, described his country and the energy reform in 6 steps it went through between the conference in Copenhagen in 2009 and now, in 2021. All steps are described in the Heliosthana guidebook. Adel Mourtada then focused on some challenges that are typical for the region and on Heliosthana's solutions.



Adel Mourtada © WWF/Frédéric Amiaud

Heliosthana's inhabitants were not aware of climate change and the problems related to energy. Hence, the government organized an in-depth analysis of the cultural and social context and undertook the development of an "energy saving" culture.

In order to avoid the negative financial spiral of dependence on energy subsidies combined with increasing energy consumption, the country progressively reduced fossil and electricity subsidies and replaced those with a social electricity tariff, enabling the poor to have access to energy, while avoiding inconsiderate energy consumption. This decreased the burden of subsidies on the public budget and reduced the gap between energy prices and renewable energy production costs. Some of the public money that was saved through reduced subsidies was used to support renewable energy sources.

One of Heliosthana's priorities has been to phase out energy waste as much as possible. Inefficient appliances were banned, labels informed consumers, energy audits were supported financially and even mandatory in some cases, and special efficiency programmes were promoted, for instance for solar water heating.

A national renewable energy plan ensured the development and increased uptake of renewable energy to 20 percent of the mix in 2020. This plan did not only include financial support schemes, but also paid particular attention to administrative barriers, technical barriers etc.

The success of this plan led the country to exchange renewable electricity with its neighbours. In this context, the Mediterranean Solar Plan was very helpful. It also supported solar projects that remained too expensive for Heliosthana at that time, even after the energy reforms.

In order to fully participate in and benefit from the MSP, Heliosthana had published 10 recommendations to the Mediterranean Solar Plan in 2010. These recommendations can be found in its guidebook.

Adel Mourtada concluded his presentation by mentioning some of the several benefits that Heliosthana is enjoying since it has started to change its energy system. All participants were invited to visit Heliosthana.

A panel of four distinguished speakers, Mohend Mahouche, Chairman of the Heliosthanian Fund for the Environment, Raul Romeva i Rueda, MEP, Lettemieke Mulder, First Solar, and Pedro Ballesteros Torres, DG Energy at the European Commission then debated about the impacts of the energy reforms in Heliosthana. The debate was led by Claude Weinber, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union Director.



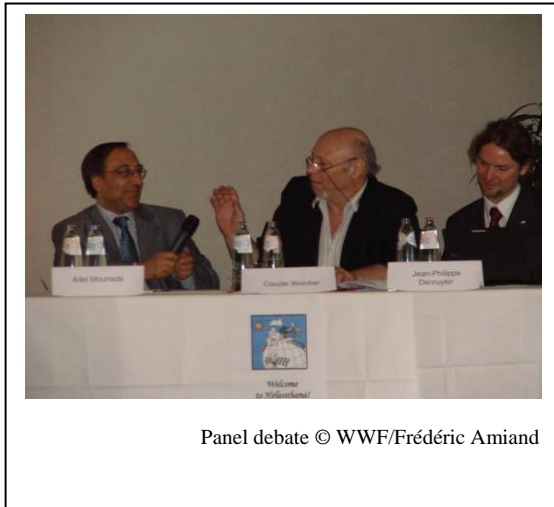
Mohend Mahouche opened the debate by underlining the importance of the broad consultation in Heliosthana at the beginning of the reforms. He mentioned the several social and environmental benefits related to this switch to sustainable energy. Mohend Mahouche insisted on the importance of applying social and environmental standards to the development of renewable energy.

Raul Romeva i Rueda congratulated Heliosthana for not having chosen the nuclear option but for wisely focusing on efficiency and renewables. He underlined the importance of the early EU decision to define renewable energy targets for 2030, 2040 and 100% renewable energy by 2050. This enabled a better understanding of the importance of renewable electricity exchange between regions. He also highlighted the great decision by Heliosthana for having given grid priority access for renewable electricity and for taking all measures not to export fossil electricity to the EU, which would have created carbon leakage.

Lettemieke Mulder explained how Heliosthana had created an enabling environment for renewable energy business and solar companies in Heliosthana. This had led several companies to invest long-term in the country, not only in electricity plants but also in manufacturing capacity. This enabling environment includes setting ambitious goals, a clear regulatory framework, and incentives for research and education, and an excellent multi-stakeholder dialogue on the country's goals and actions. Among other things, the stakeholder consultations and the great dialogue in the country had resulted in good land-

use planning decisions and several fruitful agricultural cooperation projects combining food production, renewable energy production and biodiversity benefits.

Pedro Ballesteros Torres, who is in charge of the Convention of Mayors at the Commission, underlined the importance of action at the local and city level. He congratulated Heliosthana for their bottom-up action and the involvement of society at all levels. At the end of his speech Pedro Ballesteros invited Heliosthana through Mr Mourtada to join the Convention of Mayors.



Participants made some interesting observations during the Q&A. One comment in particular drew our attention: why doesn't Heliosthana's energy & environment agency (EEA) join MEDENER, the Mediterranean Association of National Agencies for Energy Conservation? Heliosthana will seriously consider this request. The aim of Heliosthana is now to share and exchange good practices as much as possible.

Participants were also wondering whether the Heliosthana experience had been shared with Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Mr Denruyter mentioned that a workshop has already taken place in Hammamet with North African and Middle Eastern participants. More discussions are planned.

Some comments were made on the costs of different renewable energy technologies. Adel Mourtada replied that these costs were close to average international costs but still different due to local circumstances.

Claude Weinber thanked the speakers and participants and particularly Adel Mourtada, Prime Minister of Heliosthana. Heliosthana will continue to inspire us and hopefully there will be other opportunities to work together.