

Appendix/Anhang 1

Statement of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and
Forestry, Environment & Water Management, Austria
Statement des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für
Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Umwelt und Wasserwirtschaft

Heinz Schreiber, Austria/Österreich
(audiotranscription)

In Vertretung von Bundesminister Wilhelm Molterer gab Sektionschef Heinz Schreiber folgendes Statement zur Entwicklung der Österreichischen Umweltpolitik nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg.

It is difficult to describe in five minutes the tensions between the public, civil society, the administration, business and industry. Anyway, a short historical outline will make it easier. After World War II we had a period of reconstruction, a new approach, everything was possible. We were determined to bring everything under our control and we believed with the skill of mankind we can manage everything. The period of reconstruction was important for the continent as a whole, I think, also for Austria. We did a big jump forward in technology, in life style and civilisation. At that time environmental issues were not even in a side thought considered in the main stream thinking, in the main stream politics. It was also at that time that a lot of ancient knowledge which was spread, especially in the mountain areas where people live close to nature, where people were used to observe nature very closely, where people have a lot of wisdom about nature and the action of nature. What we Austrians did was that we built skiing areas, resorts in the mountains where avalanches could come down. The knowledge of former accidents was forgotten or not really considered. Other big mistakes were made by building high apartment houses in the mountains without the necessary infrastructure. Mistakes were made in using nature. It was very unsustainable. Today we are a bit better off because we have been greening some of the skiing slopes in the mountains. We understand the problem we have created and we are trying to heal a bit the wounds we have put on the mountains. This is one aspect.

Smoking chimneys showed the limits

After the 1950s and 1960s, when the smoke of chimneys was the symbol of growth, good economy and wealth, we came to our limits. We found out that this is not our way. And in the end of the 1960s environmentalists and people concerned about the environment gathered in strong civil society groups (NGOs) and

tried first locally, then on a more regional and then global level, in order to bring the concerns of ecology into the minds of politicians which was very difficult at the beginning. The first conference in Europe on environment was in Stockholm in 1972 on a ministerial level. And that was more or less the official starting point of environmental policy in the — at that time — Western European states. Most of the countries at the time established their ministries of environment or other ministries became responsible for environment. The Germans had the Ministry of the Internal Affairs responsible for environment. That was a start. But still at that very time it was a very emotional start. People of the NGOs, people concerned about the environment, were very aggressive. They were trying to push their ideas and to force the government in a way that they thought is the ultimate wisdom. I say that very provocatively because you have to challenge sometimes to get things on the way. The more provocative you are, the more chances you have on the other side that there is a certain balance between what is possible and what you might wish. And that will be the outcome of the politics. But without provocation very often there is no movement. I also have to add here that it is not only provocation but also bad experience. If you have rivers and lakes like in Austria polluted in a way that was unacceptable, that was of course a confrontation for the politics. When the people noticed that this is not bearable anymore they put some pressure on the politics. At that very time everybody saw his own politics in his own way. There were the environmentalists, there were the economic people who thought the environmentalists are crazy idiots, there were the environmentalists who thought the economists are the only ones to destroy the world. To remember the first rapport of the Club of Rome in the 1970s we said, 'in 20 years time oil is off and we will go back to the caves.' It was a very provocative rapport. But it brought up the awareness, the consciousness for ecological problems for the first time.

'Betonköpfe' versus grass root environmentalists

What did politics do? For the very beginning they said, well, 'there are some people who are against what we are doing, who make a lot of noise, maybe they are also the electorate which we need for the next election, so let's try to have some discussion with them.' The very beginning were meetings, proposals on the table, sometimes there was aggression, the communication did not work. Both sides had to learn to deal with each other. It was a very educative process which took about ten years. In this time you still had the concrete heads on the one side ('Betonköpfe') and on the other side the grass roots environmentalists. When I look now at the Austrian politics we had at the end of the 1970s worked seriously to develop our own environmental policy. I am very careful, because I know that at the time environmental policy was very weak and it was more or less nature protection, protection of some forest areas, of some marshlands a.o. Later people discovered that most of our everyday life is in one or the other way related to ecological aspects. At first the car was one of the targets of the environmentalists, the high consumption of energy of cars, the oils used ineffectively. A car running in the city uses about 8 % of its potential only. If you think of it, it is a waste of a very valuable source of energy. A lot of this reached the surface and people started thinking about it. Then of course came the policy that we do support the NGOs, the civic

societies. Ministries of environment became responsible for the environment and started to have a strong role in the government. Not because they liked the environmentalists, it was a mere political balance. How many voters, what I can do to get a good press in the papers for the next elections. That was the main intention, but it helped and did a good job.

Environment became an issue in politics

Differently in some states in Europe environment became an issue in politics. The European Union founded an economic union. Of course the free market had top priority. Everybody who wanted to disturb the free market exchange of goods would be an obstacle to growth and wealth. It was a difficult period within these institutions. It was also the OECD which was a larger organization not only focused on Western Europe. But everywhere it became a real fight. Here was the economic line: 'We are aware of environmental aspects, we listen to you but then we do, what we want. We try to please you with some minor issues to meet your proposals or we try to convince you that we do it in a different way.' And then about 15 years ago people started to think in a more complex way. It was first from science and engineering that the idea came, you cannot just be an environmentalist, you have to see things in their complexity. The first approach was taken within the European Union, not on the national level, but within the EU. On the national level it is sometimes more difficult to integrate environmental and ecological aspects in politics than it was on EU level. Why, because they had many European countries and they thought we must do something that they like us more. First there was a single act in 1982 which meant that environmental aspects should be integrated in all the politics of the EU. That was the first breakthrough. Then came the Amsterdam Maastricht Treaty where we have already the constitutions of the EU. And then we have some legal instruments we can rely on.

Environment is part of all EU-policies

Today we have within the constitutions of the EU clearly stated that the environment and health issues should be considered in all politics. Of course that's only a first step. It's not done everywhere. But you can always point it out and say, 'look we have here an obligation which you have to follow now, be it now the commission of energy or the commission of economics, whoever.' And also on the national level we had to start integrating policy. In Austria we made a national environmental plan first, and then we made those strategies where we integrated the environmental policies into other policies. And that is the main issue, that's the future of sustainable development and of policy as a whole. We can't see policies in one box. We cannot put up all the boxes, open a box for energy, open a box for transport, open a box for agriculture with no interlinkages. When at the university e.g. some of the academics want to have their own yard, which nobody should disturb, they do not want to have any intercourse with others. That's in a way also with politics and ministries. A very popular word within the EU and the international administration was 'we will not allow environment to impose rules on our politics.' That was the idea and the word to fight for. 'We are the economists, we

know what the free market is. We know what the free exchange of goods is, so don't let the environmentalists impose any rules on us or patronize us.'

At present we are coming to a state of politics where integration is more and more effective. And that is the real goal of all the cooperations. Speaking of business in NGOs and in the administration, we have now a lot for us, where we are really co-operating on equal level. Of course when governments are negotiating with NGOs or business NGOs they cannot be at the same levels but they are observers. So is CIPRA as NGOs an observer in the Alpine convention. And that's so with many other negotiations and conventions where we have the observers who bring in their opinion and also of course business. There is a World Business Council and all these issues. There is also in Brussels the European Environment Bureau which is lobbying at the commissions for environmental issues. In that regard the pure economic organization was doing an environmental outlook till 2020. We were a small group of experts who did that. And we tried to introduce environmental aspects also within the OECD, a pure economic organization. There is now an environmental strategy adopted by the ministers and a strategy of sustainable development also adopted by the ministers. The question is to what extent these strategies are implemented in everyday's life. That will show the future.

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HEINZ SCHREIBER studied mathematics, physics and chemistry at Vienna University, organic chemistry at the Technical University of Vienna. He joined later the Ministry of Science and Research in Vienna. In 1986, due to his environmental inclination he was appointed head of the group in charge of environmental affairs in the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environments and Water Management. At the conference Heinz Schreiber was appointed as the Austrian expert on environmental affairs by the Minister despite his retirement as expert in political environmental affairs. He is the Head politician of Austrian environmental affairs.

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