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MdEP: EU Klimaverpflichtung getrennt von Kopenhagen-Abkommen

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"Unser Engagement für den Klimaschutz sollte unabhängig von Kopenhagen stattfinden", sagte Jo Leinen, der neu gewählte Vorsitzende des Umweltausschusses im Europäischen Parlament, gegenüber EurActiv in einem Interview, wobei er betonte, dass "wenn Kopenhagen ein Erfolg wird, um so besser, wenn nicht, müssen wir uns auf unsere Arbeit konzentrieren".

Der deutsche sozialdemokratische EU-Abgeordnete Jo Leinen ist der Vorsitzende des Ausschusses für Umweltfragen, Volksgesundheit und Lebensmittelsicherheit im Europäischen Parlament (ENVI).

Um eine Zusammenfassung des Interviews zu lesen, klicken Sie bitte hier.

You began your political life in Germany's environmental movement, and now you are going back to the green agenda as the new chair of the environment committee in the European Parliament's next legislature. What do you think will be the big difference between constitutional affairs and the environment?

In both cases, the big question is 'what future for Europe?' In the AFCO committee, it was more about the institutional set-up, and in the environment committee, it is the sustainability of our economies, of our social systems and of course of our environmental behaviour.

The AFCO gave it a framework, the institutional, constitutional and legal framework. During the Lisbon Treaty negotiations, I fought for climate protection, which is now in the treaty. So it is sort of two sides of the same coin.

The new Parliament starts proceedings in the midst of full-on negotiations for a global climate deal ahead of the UN conference in Copenhagen. Can Europe keep its leadership?

The economic and financial crisis should not be a pretext to lower our ambitions. We have to stick to the energy and climate package that was decided in December, for our position in the negotiations but also for us.

Since US President [Barack] Obama has been in office, we have bigger chances to come to a deal. We have committed ourselves to the 20-20-20 targets and the option that we go to CO2 reduction of 30% if other developed and developing countries come up with equally ambitious targets.

But at the G8, it seemed clear that other industrialised countries have difficulty setting mid-term targets. They pledged an 80% reduction by 2050, but can't come up with a mid-term aim for reduction...

Our engagement for climate protection should be independent from Copenhagen. If Copenhagen is a success, all the better; if not, we have to stick to our job.

The climate package was not conditional on results in Copenhagen. It was a self-evident challenge to meet and would not stop climate protection even if Copenhagen does not bring results.

We are now going into implementation of the climate package. We have to fulfill our own promises and obligations.

Do you think that the Parliament's shift to the right will penalise the work of the environment committee in the next legislature?

It is true that we have an ideological shift to the right, but politically I think that climate protection is fashionable, also for bourgeois society and bigger parts of the industry.

We have also shifted the understanding and the interest of more businesses, which see the new climate package as a chance for profits, new investments and new markets. I am optimistic that we are at a turning point, where they come along with us. I don't think they are not going to be in antagonism, as happened before.

Yet, when you look at the recovery packages, only a smaller part goes towards green investments...

True. Much of the recovery plans earmark billions for the rescue of banks to stabilise their deficits, or going to help big car companies. Nevertheless, I see a tendency that this recovery is investing in human beings, in education and qualifications, but as well in environmental initiatives.

Sure, the balance sheet is not good because most money is not in sustainable development. There is still a big job to do.

The European Commission has been thinking of reorganising portfolios, for example, by having a climate/energy DG. What do you think of this idea? Will there be a restructuring of the ENVI committee as well?

No, we have decided to have the two committees separate. We have this duality which is good and we think Barroso should do the

same, if it is going to be Barroso.

They should not work against each other. The traditional power companies are still a big lobbying force. The independence of the environment directorate-general is important. It should be free from the powerful nuclear and fossil industries lobbies.

Some, in the environmental movement, say nuclear is part of the solution to tackle climate change. What do you think?

I don't think there will be a renaissance of nuclear energy, as it is part of the problem, not a solution. It is attractive for some countries.

But if you look at the global situation, it is clear that this only a programme for some, and not a programme for many, for the minority and not the majority.

I don't know if you followed the German industry Desertec programme, where companies want to invest EUR 400 billion in the next 10 years to get up to 20% of our electricity consumption out of the Sahara desert. Such a project will also allow Morocco and Algeria to get part of their energy supply from renewables, which is a perfect programme for the Mediterranean Union.

These industries, Siemens, E.ON, Munich RE, they are all in different fields, but if they come together for such a project, it shows they have understood that nuclear is not possible in Germany and in many countries.

France, however, has agreed a nuclear deal with Algeria.

Yes, but they have not built one yet. There is the German solar industry against the French nuclear industry. It is a real competition between Morocco and Algeria. The next few months and years will be decisive on which direction we go, on whether we take the solar or the nuclear path.

Will it be also France against Germany?

No, but between the industry lobbies that are behind the projects. But at the end, you are right...

The Swedish EU Presidency is trying to push for a CO2 tax to complement the EU's emissions trading scheme (ETS), as the trading scheme only covers 40% of emissions. Even France is now pushing for a CO2 tax. What do you think of this move?

I think we should work with the ETS in order to give planning security to our industry. We cannot hop from one system to the other in a short time.

There was a long debate about ETS and there are industries that are fully or partly complying with it. Some use the argument that as long as world competitors do not comply with such a system, there is going to be carbon leakage = meaning companies will relocate outside of Europe to maintain a competitive advantage with Africa and Asia, and that is not the solution.

I think we should discuss the CO2 tax, but not make the second step before having made the first one. The first one is to implement well the ETS system and then see if there are vacuums or deficits. There should not be double-burdening on industry.

There are going to be elections in Germany in September. The Social Democrats might suffer a blow and fall into opposition. Would that have an impact at European level?

The Social Democrats in Germany are the driving force for the Green New Deal. All our positions, programmes and policies are going towards green jobs.

Of course if the conservatives and the liberals are winning, there could be a backlash. We will become more conservative, more passive that's true, but the whole climate package will be part of the election campaign.

We should not underestimate the whole energy lobbies, there are hundreds thousands of people working there. They succeeded in giving subsidies to renewable companies.

Even the Liberals are coming to terms with this new direction. But it will be a harder fight, because the nuclear industry will profit from it. They might not get to the point of building new nuclear power stations, but the old ones might get permission to continue working for a while.

The S&D, ALDE and EPP signed a technical agreement for the presidency of the Parliament. Do you think this will be extended to other areas? Are we heading for a grand coalition?

No. It is really an agreement for the re-establishment of the Parliament and giving stability to main functions, and especially making sure that committee chairs do not go to Eurosceptics.

Every law is a normal competition of interest and ideas, and every topic has to find its own majority.

As we have seen in the past, the liberals are very often the majority makers. They go with the EPP on the economy and social issues, they come with us on the human rights and civil liberties. But there are more kingmakers in this Parliament. We have only one group more.

They were in the EPP so ideologically they will vote with them. On institutional affairs, with the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, we won't see much happening in the next five years.

But one should not underestimate the non-affiliated or extremists. But the latter will be marginalised as long as they are racist and anti-European.