

INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR KLAUS SCHARIOTH

GCRI Interview with the German Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Klaus Scharioth, on the occasion of the 2-year anniversary of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge.

Ambassador Scharioth, the Transatlantic Climate Bridge was initiated by the German government on September 30, 2008. On December 16, 2008, it was launched in the United States. How would you describe the effect of this initiative on the relationship between the U.S. and Germany?

The German government created the Transatlantic Climate Bridge initiative with the aim of engaging Americans working in the climate and energy arena on all levels. The aim is to reach out to all those players at the local, regional, and federal levels in the U.S. who are interested in developing renewable energy, increasing energy efficiency, and reducing our carbon footprint.

On the one hand, the Transatlantic Climate Bridge is achieving this goal by building on existing transatlantic cooperation in the fields of politics, research, and business.

A company such as First Solar, the largest manufacturer of thin-film solar cells in the world, is an excellent example of a U.S. company thriving in Germany due to a favorable business climate for renewable energies.

Existing partnerships between Northern Virginia and Stuttgart, Schleswig-Holstein and Maryland, Wisconsin and Bavaria, South Carolina and Rhineland-Palatinate, and Pennsylvania and North-Rhine Westphalia were also a good basis for further cooperation on a regional level.

But, on the other hand, the launch of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge in the U.S. has also initiated strong *new* relationships in recent years between Germany and a variety of U.S. states and stakeholders. A range of transatlantic events and travel programs offering the opportunity for increased communication and the exchange of best practices between Americans and Germans have fostered sustainable relationships and increased transatlantic cooperation.

I believe working together to face the combined challenges of a global economic recession and increasing global greenhouse gas emissions will only serve to deepen the strong foundations of the relationship between the U.S. and Germany.

Since its initiation, has the Transatlantic Climate Bridge changed the science and technology dialogue between Germany and the United States?

The science and technology dialogue between Germany and the United States has always been a vital element in our thriving transatlantic relationship. In the same year the Transatlantic Climate Bridge was launched, the German Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems and MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded the MIT Fraunhofer Center for Sustainable Energy Systems. It immediately became a center for world-class opportunities in the exchange of best practices and expertise.

The Transatlantic Climate Bridge has further built on this long-standing science and technology dialogue by focusing on the latest high-tech issues concerning climate and energy. In September, for example, the German Embassy hosted an extremely well-attended conference on the subject "Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) – Viable Technology or Risky Gamble?". The event was organized in cooperation with the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and the German GEOTECHNOLOGIEN Coordination Office and brought together American and German scientists and industry representatives to discuss the viability of CCS on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a world leader in climate policy and new environmental technologies, Germany has made international commitments to considerably reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and is thoroughly investigating carbon capture and underground storage as one of its approaches to achieving this commitment. Like Germany, the United States equally recognizes the importance of CCS technology, with President Obama's task force report, which was published in August, encouraging CCS technologies.

These kinds of conferences bring German and U.S. experts together and encourage them to exchange views and ideas and to strengthen existing levels of cooperation – one of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge's main goals.

At the GCRI opening on February 19, 2010, you said in your speech that you see the Transatlantic Climate Bridge as a model for many more joint approaches and projects that would appeal to the scientific and business communities. Could you share a project that was created out of this effort?

An excellent example of growing transatlantic cooperation is the green building sector, an area in which the Transatlantic Climate Bridge has been and will continue to be very active. Cooperation and the exchange of best practices between Germany and the U.S. in this field has moved it from a niche to a profitable business sector in recent years on both sides of the Atlantic.

In recognition of this development, the German Embassy has organized a series of green building conferences as part of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge initiative – the latest having taken place in April – which focus on new market opportunities.

Michelle Moore, the Federal Environmental Executive on Environmental Quality, gave the keynote speech, in which she spoke of President Obama's determination to "make sustainability a part of our mission."

This goal was reiterated by several internationally renowned players in the world of sustainable building, including William McDonough and his business partner, Michael Braungart, the German chemist and designer. They spoke of their role in this field as "business people working with business people to create good business practices" – a sure sign of the growing financial clout of the sector and also of the development it has witnessed in recent years, thanks to German-U.S. cooperation.

Given the green building sector's vital role as a link between the scientific and business communities, the Transatlantic Climate Bridge will continue to focus on its development, with further transatlantic events planned in 2011.

Chancellor Merkel presented Germany's 40-year energy plan on September 7. How do you see the role of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge in helping Germany's goal to achieve the most efficient and environmentally sound energy supply worldwide?

Chancellor Angela Merkel has called the German government's 40-year energy plan a "revolution in the field of energy supply." The comprehensive plan aims to make Germany's energy supply the most efficient and environmentally sound worldwide, while at the same time ensuring that energy remains affordable for both households and businesses.

Most importantly, the Nine-Point Program sends a clear message that renewable energies are to make up the majority share in the energy mix of the future. In concrete terms, this means that the share of renewable energies in Germany's gross electricity consumption should total 80 percent by 2050.

Germany knows that such ambitious targets cannot be easily achieved. However, it also knows that climate protection makes economic sense. More than 300,000 people are already employed in the renewable energy sector, which is now the fastest growing economic sector in the country and is attracting millions of dollars in investment also from overseas.

The Transatlantic Climate Bridge's role in this trend is to communicate to the U.S. the German government's energy goals, the opportunities inherent in the path to a low carbon economy, and the opportunities in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions through transatlantic cooperation.

You are an alumnus of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), one of the GCRI's "parent" organizations. On October 28, you will open the joint DAAD and Alexander von Humboldt alumni meeting focusing on the topic "Facing the Four Elements: Developing a Transatlantic Approach to Sustainability." How important do you consider German-American exchanges in fostering sustainability?

Americans and Europeans have been successfully joining forces for decades to address the key challenges facing us. Today, we must work together to tackle the common and urgent challenges of climate change, energy security, and economic growth.

It has become clear that a stable climate and sustainable, reliable, and affordable sources of energy are crucial to our economies and to our security. By working together on climate and energy policy, Germans and Americans can be a powerful engine for transatlantic cooperation and progress.

This, again, is the reason why we launched the Transatlantic Climate Bridge initiative in 2008. By bringing together the main players in climate and energy from German and American politics, business, and society, we are creating a platform to see how Germany's new energy economy has created strong opportunities for economic growth and job creation and how this can offer valuable lessons for similar developments in the U.S.

By connecting and supporting all those who seek to make a difference – at the local, state, and federal levels – both in Germany and in the U.S., I believe that sustainable, safe, and affordable energy is within our reach.