

Greenpeace active in the financial sector

The JPIC group was privileged at its recent meeting to welcome Raymond Aendekerck, National Director of Greenpeace Luxembourg. He began by briefly describing the path that led him to Greenpeace. Born to a farming family in north Luxembourg, after school he studied chemistry and then went to Vienna to study agriculture, which entailed travel in central Africa and resulted in a thesis on beekeeping in Tanzania. When he was ready to look for a job, Hëllef fir d'Natur in Luxembourg was looking for an agronomist, and he worked with them for 28 years, during which time the organisation grew from three employees to 30 and completed various projects including working with local authorities to improve biodiversity, plant trees, etc, and restoring the 'Haus vun der Natur' in Kockelscheuer which is now the headquarters of the organisation – which has meanwhile changed its name to 'natur & ëmwelt'. He also worked in Brussels representing organic farmers to help adopt the organic standards which have now become EU law. After so many years he was ready for a new challenge and Greenpeace Luxembourg was looking for a director.

Greenpeace as a whole is an international organisation with millions of members that employs around 3400 people. Before adopting its current 10-year plan it consulted its members on their priorities. 50 000 of them voted, and the result was a worldwide focus on two main areas: biodiversity, including agriculture, forestry and oceans; and climate change, with a major focus on energy sources. Greenpeace Luxembourg with its staff of 17 does not have the capacity to work effectively in all those areas. In collaboration with Greenpeace France it has decided to concentrate its efforts on two main areas under the climate change heading: campaigning against nuclear power, and divestment from fossil fuels. The Luxembourg Government is firmly against nuclear power, but it is in a difficult position with French and Belgian nuclear power stations close to its borders, and Greenpeace France welcomes Luxembourg's help in its campaigns against the French Government's nuclear plans.

As Luxembourg is a major financial centre it makes sense to campaign to persuade fund managers not to invest in coal and other fossil fuels, but to invest in renewable energies instead. Some of the fund managers Greenpeace speaks to are receptive to this message as they are becoming increasingly aware that investment in fossil fuels is risky. Greenpeace is continuing a dialogue with this sector and trying to find ways to influence politicians and shareholders, who are not always aware where their money is going. Some investment funds are not as green or transparent as they should be – the Luxembourg Government pension fund was found to be investing in cluster bombs, and intensive research into other funds revealed hidden investments in fossil fuels and nuclear energy.

A main focus of campaigning is the Paris Agreement on climate change, which is why there is currently a large model of the Eiffel Tower on Kirchberg next to a temporary Greenpeace office, so that the many financial experts working on Kirchberg are frequently reminded of the issue. It's urgent. Last year China's carbon emissions increased by 3% - equivalent to the whole of Spain's output. It's particularly important to stop investment in new nuclear power stations, which block capital that could be invested in renewables and are becoming increasingly uneconomic as the price of renewable energy comes down.

Participants at the meeting pointed out that the EIB is on Greenpeace's side and is assisting renewables with its Green Bonds market and also supporting energy efficiency in publicly-owned buildings. They also put a significant question: If the urgent priority is reducing carbon emissions, why campaign against nuclear power, which may not be ideal but at least has low carbon emissions? Aendekerck replied that nuclear power is not as carbon neutral as is claimed, but the main argument is an economic one: electricity from renewable sources is becoming cheaper all the time, and nuclear energy is only economic if the electricity price is kept artificially high. Electricity

companies that rely on nuclear are building up large debts. The enormous cost of decommissioning nuclear reactors has not been fully accounted for, long-term safety is not guaranteed and the issue of storage of radioactive materials has not been resolved.

Another question was on the contribution of animal agriculture to greenhouse gases, and why Greenpeace is silent on this. For the reason stated above, this is not Greenpeace's main current focus in Luxembourg, but two years ago it started Food for Life, a research-based campaign to reduce meat and milk consumption. It aims to change agricultural policy and raise awareness in places such as school and workplace canteens. At present this campaign is most active in the USA, China, Argentina and Austria. There is certainly a need to increase awareness in Luxembourg. Meat and milk production play a large part in Luxembourg's agriculture, farmers having been encouraged in this direction since the 1960s by the Common Agricultural Policy. Despite the subsidy for organic production and research showing that organic farms in Luxembourg are more efficient in their use of nitrogen and have more biodiversity, there are only 80 organic farms in Luxembourg, 4% of the total, which is one of the lowest percentages of organic farms in Europe.

Consumption overall needs to be reduced if the Paris Agreement objectives are to be met. A current project at the Haus vun der Natur demonstrates the connections between eating habits, land use and environmental protection and shows that 2000 m² per person is enough to grow food sustainably to feed everyone on the planet – but only if everyone reduces their meat consumption to about 50% of the 90 kg that most people in developed countries eat every year.

Greenpeace necessarily has to keep itself separate from political parties, though of course there is support from the Green party, and from the Government, to the extent that Xavier Bettel has been known to shake the hands of anti-nuclear demonstrators. Many local authorities and churches have undertaken green initiatives, such as planting a tree for each First Communion child, and placing solar panels on public buildings such as schools.

In answer to a concluding question, what are the five most effective things an individual can do to reduce carbon emissions, we came up with the following:

Use more public transport, cycle or walk, no long-haul flights

Eat less meat and dairy

Produce less waste and avoid single-use plastic

Reduce consumption in general – re-use old things

Improve home insulation – not forgetting garage/cellar ceilings – and turn heating down.

Aendekerk had an additional comment about local ecological initiatives – people should be prepared to invest their own money and improve their understanding of economic aspects – local shops are a good thing, but they will only be economic if local people are prepared to invest in and support them. Greenpeace works with the Transition movement, which supports local ecological initiatives, including preserving traditional handicraft skills which are in danger of being lost. In general a focus on spiritual values rather than materialism is to be encouraged.

Philippa Seymour