

Böll Conference: “From Fukushima to Hinkley: Dismantling the nuclear argument for a sustainable energy future”¹

Event Report

On 11 March 2011, one of the most powerful earthquakes on record hit the north-east of Japan. The resulting tsunami struck the nuclear power plant Fukushima Daiichi and heavily damaged the plant. Massive amounts of radioactive material were released into the environment. Since Chernobyl in 1986 this has been the largest nuclear disaster with far-reaching consequences.

Four years after the disaster and in light of the recent decision of the European Commission to allow the UK government to heavily subsidise a new nuclear reactor at Hinkley Point C in South-West England, this conference aimed at dismantling the nuclear argument on a national and European level. With distinguished speakers and experts from the UK, Germany, Austria and Luxembourg, this one-day conference dissected the pro-nuclear argument and brought forward arguments and facts to support a sustainable energy future. This report presents the main arguments that have been discussed at the conference.

Panel I: Economic perspectives from Japan

In the first panel on “Economic perspectives from Japan”, chaired by Rebecca Harms, a detailed analysis of the current situation in Japan was given by key note speaker **Tetsunari Iida**, executive director of the Institute for Sustainable Energy Policies, a non-profit and independent research institute based in Tokyo, Japan, focusing on sustainable energy policies. In 2011 he launched the Japan Renewable Energy Foundation which brings together some 100 experts from around the world to analyse obstacles to implementing renewable energy, and offer policy recommendations to the new Japanese government.



In the last five years, he has been one of the top opinion leaders in Japan promoting a “new generation of energy policies” and is appointed as the Governmental committee member for “Energy Policy” and “Renewable Energy Policy”.

In his presentation, he explained further what Fukushima has meant economically for Japan. Apart from the devastating impacts on the environment, it also meant a divestment from renewables.

¹ This Böll Conference took place on 5th March in the Europe House in London. Four MEPs hosted respective panels focussing on 1) **Economic perspectives from Japan** (Chair: Rebecca Harms, Co-President of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament), 2) **Implications of Fukushima in Europe** (Chair: Claude Turmes, MEP), 3) **The impact of Hinkley in the South West** (Chair: Molly Scott Cato, MEP) and 4) **The legal case against Hinkley** (Chair: Michel Reimon, MEP). Kathrin Glastra, Liaison Energy Transition Western Europe, Deputy Director Climate and Energy Programme, Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung European Union, concluded the session. For the presentations, please follow the link on our website <http://eu.boell.org/en/categories/energy>.

Dr. Iida gave the audience a first-hand insight into the current situation in Fukushima and on how the disaster impacted life in Japan: as a society and in terms of its economic and energy policy - especially, in the light of the recent controversial debate on returning to nuclear power.

Panel 2: Implication of Fukushima in Europe

The second panel, chaired by Claude Turmes, looked back at Europe: which role does nuclear still play in Europe and how has the EU reacted to the Fukushima disaster? **Antony Froggatt**, Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House and an Honorary Research Fellow at Exeter University, presented the current “World Nuclear Industry Status Report” with some interesting details for Europe in particular: France produces half of EU’s nuclear electricity, more generally the global and European trend of the industry remains moribund with a decline in the electricity markets.

Andreas Kraemer, Founder and Director Emeritus of Ecologic Institute in Berlin, Germany, spoke to the audience about the German “Energiewende” and the current challenges the necessary reforms are bringing. Despite popular belief, emissions have gone down again in Germany in 2014, thus dismantling the argument that the German nuclear phase-out comes at the price of a coal renaissance. He focused in particular on the issue of energy (in-)dependence and that Germany as well as the EU have the capacities to do without Russian or other imports.

Panel 3: The impact of Hinkley in the South West

Zooming in further into Europe, this panel focused in particular on the situation in the South West of England, where the Hinkley Point C construction is planned. **Andrew Clarke** of the Resilience Centre in Gloucestershire presented a draft of his upcoming report on how the South West can meet 100%+ of its energy needs from renewables and how nuclear can undermine investment in renewables. **Steve Thomas**, Professor of Energy Policy in the Business School of the University of Greenwich, London, further strengthened this argument with his presentation. He focused specifically on the costs of failure of the UK’s nuclear power programme. He compared the promises with the expected outcomes and stressed that the subsidies hindered nuclear to compete in the market on equal footing, which would in turn show how uneconomical – besides the massive risks – nuclear policy has become. **Theo Simon** from the local Stop Hinkley Campaign



has played a leading role in local resistance to plans for the Hinkley C new nuclear power station in Somerset. For 2 years he was a press spokesperson for the Stop Hinkley campaign, appearing on national and local media, and he was arrested for joining an occupation of the proposed site in 2011. He is still under a High Court Injunction from EDF, and is currently the Green Party Parliamentary Candidate for Somerton and Frome. He gave an impression on what the planned investment really meant for people in the region and how a lot of resistance was met.

Panel 4: The legal case against Hinkley

In the last panel, two experts explained the planned legal procedures against the Hinkley decision.

Rudi Anschober is an Upper Austrian politician for the Green Party and, since 2003, State Councillor of Upper Austria for Environment, Water and Consumer Protection. Since he won the mandate for the State Council he has been opposing nuclear power and advocating alternative energies at regional and national level. He presented the Austrian government's plan to take legal action against the Hinkley decision, despite some intimidation efforts from the UK.

Paul Dorfman of the Energy Institute of the University College in London explained further legal actions planned by competitors.



He focussed in particular on the damaging implications of the funding deal for Hinkley and the broad repercussions this would have, if held up, for European investment in nuclear in general.

The audience and the experts discussed the implications of nuclear investment for regions and countries and agreed that a lot more has to be done to inform about the risks, the ineffectiveness and the unreasonable cost of nuclear energy.

In order to reach a sustainable energy future, we do not only need to dismantle the nuclear argument with sound facts and figures, but also keep the memory alive of what happened in Fukushima four years ago in and Chernobyl 29 years ago.