

A TRANSATLANTIC CLIMATE BRIDGE FOR AMBITIOUS CLIMATE PROTECTION - PERSPECTIVES AND ALLIANCES

ONLINE FORUM 25.03.2021, 14:00-17:30

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At the end of March, the German Federal Foreign Office and adelphi picked up on the new momentum in transatlantic climate policy: 90 representatives from business, research and civil society discussed perspectives on the Transatlantic Climate Bridge established in 2008. Key areas of collaboration include a transatlantic business dialogue on climate neutrality, expanded efforts on research policy exchange, and broad engagement of subnational efforts to implement long-term decarbonization strategies. It holds true for both the transatlantic climate dialogue and global climate policy: "A little more conversation, tremendously more action!"

Introduction

A common starting point for transatlantic climate cooperation in the coming years: this is how high-ranking diplomats assessed the online forum on the prospects for future cooperation among Germany, Canada and the United States. Hinrich Thölken, Commissioner for Energy and Climate Foreign Policy and Digital Transformation at the German Federal Foreign Office, emphasised the need for new channels for mutual learning and a shared cross-national pioneering spirit in the same vein as Silicon Valley.

The important role that a transatlantic climate bridge can play was also emphasised by **Robin S. Quinville**, Chargée d'Affaires a.i. of the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. The acronym TCB (Transatlantic Climate Bridge) could also stand for "taking care of business" - not only in reference to Elvis Presley, but also because the U.S. has resolved under the new administration to place the task of climate protection at the centre of its policies.



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Through these exchanges, several partnerships and close collaborations have already been initiated to find common solutions, e.g. between North Rhine-Westphalia and Alberta on structural change and sustainable business. The exchange between West Virginia and German partners is another example of a particularly relevant topic: Climate Justice / Just Transition. In Germany, the focus here is particularly on coal regions, while in the U.S. discourse, environmental justice includes all those who suffer from climate change and pollution in their entirety, especially marginalised groups.

This cooperation across all levels helps to ensure that climate policy is pursued and implemented in a concrete way. Along with Canada, the U.S. is once again broadly positioned to do this. President Biden made a number of decisions early in his administration, including important environmental, climate and energy-related decisions. Executive Orders were issued on clean energy by 2035, re-entry into the Paris Agreement, and a net-zero economy by 2050, among others. President Biden also put on the agenda the enactment of a border moratorium to stop oil and gas licensing, which would put 30% of land in the U.S. under protection. Climate protection is being pursued as a "whole of government approach." This means that the topic of climate change runs through all ministries, e.g. also the Pentagon and the Ministry of Finance. Thus, the approach is pursued with the goal that climate must be considered in all important decisions - and this is a strong and important signal.

Further promoting international exchange among civil society groups is a priority of the Transatlantic Climate Bridge. In the U.S., movements like the Sunrise Movement have helped make climate protection a relevant campaign issue. Topics such as climate-neutral industries or divestment trends are thus put on the agenda. Germany, for its part, can set a good example by sharing experiences on the energy transition, passive houses, the circular economy, recycling or public transport. The exchange of civil society can also lead to better acceptance of government and long-term goals being addressed in a substantial way.

Impulses

Sabine Nallinger (Executive Director, Stiftung 2 Grad), **Dr. Karsten Hess** (Deputy Head of Division, Department "Global Change - Climate, Biodiversity," Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF)), and **Agnes Schönfelder** (Head of Department Climate Protection, City of Mannheim, Spokesperson Green Deal Mannheim, Managing Director Climate Protection Agency Mannheim) provided food for thought from the three perspectives of business, research and civil society. Afterwards, the participants took the opportunity to directly exchange experiences and possibilities for action in the three areas in working groups together with the experts.

The priorities of a transatlantic climate bridge in the coming years will be strongly influenced by the great commitment of business and civil society. The 2 Degrees Foundation illustrates how resolutely many companies are backing the opportunities of the Green Deal and are determined to implement climate neutrality. 2021 will be marked by the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow, whose success can also be promoted by a strong transatlantic climate alliance. In order to jointly identify the conditions for achieving



Vera Rodenhoff, Judith Neumann and Nora Löhle
(from top to bottom)

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transformation, additional dialogue structures are needed, also to discuss possible approaches such as border adjustment measures.

In terms of research policy, the signs are also pointing to change. President Biden has made climate change one of the priorities in the context of science. The multi-layered research efforts in the German research landscape on the consequences of climate change but also on questions of climate economics to innovative solutions for the transformation challenge - for example, with a view to green hydrogen or sustainable mobility infrastructures – would be fruitful entry points.

Finally, a key pillar of transatlantic climate policy can be cooperation at the subnational level – and here especially at the city level. As the city of Mannheim shows, cities with ambitious goals can be major drivers in achieving climate neutrality. A variety of exchange formats already exists, such as the Intelligent Cities initiative, in which more than 100 cities from Europe and the U.S. have joined forces. This and other formats enable peer-to-peer exchanges – and the new relevance of digital dialogues under pandemic conditions can further intensify this broad engagement of local experiences in the context of the transatlantic climate bridge.

Highlights from the interactive working groups

- In the **working group on business and economy**, the topics discussed were green recovery, possible border adjustment taxes, and the importance of a just transition. In addition, new initiatives in the area of industry dialogues and a larger-scale business dialogue on climate neutrality and competitiveness, for example in the form of a business round table, were suggested.
- In the **group discussion on research policy priorities**, research on green hydrogen, e-mobility and carbon sequestration were identified as areas of cooperation. As an important overarching research area, the societal transformation process should provide opportunities for various initiatives to bring it closer to the broader society and to help educate through dialogue.
- The **working group on subnational engagement** gathered a wide range of ideas for dialogue opportunities, including a triangular collaboration between Dortmund, Pittsburgh, and Vancouver on climate-smart food. It was suggested to systematise this cooperation in order to improve coordination - also on the German side – and to use synergies in transatlantic cooperation among the German cities.

THE PRIORITIES

... OF A
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Outlook

The forum made clear that a number of important research and innovation topics can be addressed and advanced in the transatlantic context, and that this is also necessary to achieve a climate-neutral transformation path. The aim here cannot be to allow competition to arise; instead, cooperation should be promoted and synergies exploited. In the coming months, this work package around economic dialogue, conditions for a just transition and the involvement of civil society movements in policy-making must be further tied up and implemented with determination. In the end, this also means "A little more conversation and please tremendously more action!"

Imprint

The **Climate Diplomacy initiative** and this publication are supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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