

Janez Potočnik

European Commissioner for Environment

**Sustainable Consumption and
Production as a Vehicle for Green
Growth**

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Seminar on the results of SWITCH-Asia and its applicability to other regions in the world

Brussels, 8 February 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are coming close to the end of this two-day conference. It's been a long two days - I hear that you have worked hard and well together - and I understand that it's been two very productive days. This confirms, once again, the importance of meeting and exchanging knowledge and views on issues that have such a global dimension and touch all of us.

Our everyday challenges are often very different, but we all share a direct and common concern for the risks facing our planet: The threat of climate change is already real and present, particularly for many of the poorest countries on earth; the loss of biodiversity is threatening the forests and grasslands on which up to 2 billion of the world's poorest citizens depend for their livelihood; our oceans are becoming more acidic, threatening coral reefs and fish resources; and pressure on our water resources is high and growing. The question is: With our population set to expand by 2 billion more by 2050, what can we do to address these challenges?

We believe the right answer is to SWITCH to an economy that is capable of providing economic wellbeing and health for everyone, whilst using fewer resources and with less impact on our natural capital and ecosystems. In other words, to decouple.

There are some signs that we are starting to go in the right direction. Globally, in 2002 it took about 25% less materials to produce one unit of real GDP than in 1980. As a consequence, pollutants like sulphur dioxide have been cut, and so has the acid rain they produced.

Even if this is far from enough, it does show that it is possible to generate higher living standards and, at the same time, cut consumption of materials and reduce pollution. This gives me hope and clearly shows that something can be done and should be done.

But our efforts so far have not been nearly enough to make a real difference to the crisis we are facing in terms of resources. Greenhouse gas emissions are rising; agricultural land is under pressure; the soil on which our food depends is being degraded; our marine resources are threatened; and air pollution is causing millions of premature deaths across the world.

We need to go further and accelerate the pace of our progress towards a truly green economy.

Sustainable consumption and production

To build a green economy we must look to both the supply and demand sides – to sustainable production and consumption. Our aim should be to orient the economy to minimise or reverse negative environmental trends, and to drive future growth and jobs. The green economy must support the wider goals of sustainable development, including poverty eradication. I highlighted in my opening remarks the degree to which the poorest people on earth are facing the biggest environmental challenges. Yet, their path out of poverty is most closely related.

The power of partnerships

But, how can we work together to promote a more sustainable development? This seminar has helped show the way by highlighting the importance and power of partnerships.

Partnerships between national and local stakeholders, between government and business, can help jump-start the green economy by improving skills and knowledge, identifying employment opportunities, fostering innovation, and promoting sustainable green economy investments.

As we have seen from the seminar, business partnerships will have a significant role to play in developing a green economy. Many businesses are already seeing the benefits from economising on the use of resources. The rapid growth of markets for green technologies and services mean that eco-industries are amongst the strongest-growing businesses in the world-economy today. These sectors are highly promising for stimulating quick growth and quick jobs, whilst enabling longer term competitiveness and sustainable jobs.

Rio+20

Our vision for global smart, inclusive, resource efficient and sustainable growth is incorporated in our position for the Rio+20 Summit.

It is our conviction that the road to a green economy requires action by key public and private actors at all levels – regional, national and international. That is precisely what our proposal for a 'roadmap to a green economy', with specific goals, objectives and actions aims to facilitate and encourage.

Moving towards a green economy does not mean stopping growth for the developed economies, and certainly not for developing economies. It only means pushing for a different kind of growth.

The truth is that we have no choice. If we don't do it today, we will be forced to do it tomorrow, but the difference will be that tomorrow we will have to pay a higher price.

Industrialisation and growth in the 19th and 20th centuries were marked by abundant and cheap resources. For Europe this meant great wealth and prosperity. But, it also led to a resource intensive and resource-dependent growth model, and consumption-based economies.

The same approach to growth cannot work in the 21st century. It will fail in Europe and other developed regions because competition for resources will drive up prices and make it more and more difficult to feed our resource-dependent systems. And it will fail in those regions more marked by under consumption than overconsumption, as intensive resource use will not provide sustainably for higher population levels as they seek to provide similar levels of wealth and prosperity. Emulating the industrial growth model of previous centuries will only accelerate degradation of critical resources for development such as water, energy and timber, and lead to fierce competition over resources either through price wars or even real wars.

The answer is to work towards sustainable and resource efficient growth, towards economies that secure growth and development, improve human well-being, tackle poverty and preserve the natural capital on which we all depend.

This simply means going down a different path, building on the sustainable management of the natural capital in the developing world, making use of low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions and stepping up efforts to promote sustainable patterns of production and consumption. Trial and error. We humans have repeatedly proven that we can learn from our mistakes and that we are capable of enormous innovation when we respond to threats or opportunities. And this is a great opportunity we cannot miss.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are all pursuing this opportunity in our own ways. The European Union, even in the midst of the severe financial crisis it has been experiencing, sees its future in the low carbon resource-efficient path it has set for itself. Those developing countries that are more concerned with sufficiency than efficiency are increasingly aware that the two are in fact mutually dependent. But whatever our local, regional or national characteristics, whatever the level of development of our economy, we all have an interest in adapting early to the global megatrends we face.

This is why every single one of us has a big responsibility in making Rio a success. It would be a shame if we allowed bureaucratic mechanical reflexes to bury its chances before it even starts. The outcomes have to be able to stimulate change towards sustainable development in the next couple of years. But they will also have to ensure success for future generations. That means - being able to deliver to 2020 and beyond.

With respect to the means of implementation, there needs to be a greater emphasis on all sources of finance, public and private, bilateral and multilateral, at all levels. We need "more for more" – whenever we invest more from one source, we have to attract more from another. That will require some creative thinking. It will require SWITCHING to a different approach to growth and, more generally, to a different approach to the way we think, live, consume and produce.

SWITCH replication

Here SWITCH can provide valuable lessons. I believe that green economy partnerships as enacted by programmes such as SWITCH will in the future play an important role in helping the transition to a green economy.

Over the seven years up to 2013, we allocated €150m into sustainable consumption and production partnerships across the world.

SWITCH has been a success also as a result of that. It has helped contribute to more sustainable patterns of consumption and production as well as to the Millennium Development Goals. It is a concrete outcome and valuable contribution for delivering on Rio. It shows what can be done! And it shows the value of knowledge sharing.

Since 2007, we have created 47 European-Asian partnership projects. We would like to share the lessons we have learned and show other parts of the world how it can be done.

To conclude, since the World Summits in Rio and Johannesburg, the international community has come to understand that achieving sustainable consumption and production is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

The sustainable consumption and production agenda was embedded in the Rio Declaration and Rio Principles 20 years ago. As we near Rio +20 I believe that we need to continue to develop and share the knowledge base for SCP, to continue to build the tools in a bottom-up manner adapted to the economic realities and human potential of each country and region.

But at the same time we need to increasingly mainstream SCP ideas into the global approaches to economic development, trade and finance. We need to mainstream life-cycle approaches and long-term thinking into our global models, systems and institutions. To that end, it is important that we agree on a well structured approach to support regions and countries, producers and consumers, in mainstreaming SCP in their decision making process, in raising awareness and capacity building, and in acting at all levels to deliver the needed transformation for improved resource efficiency and decoupling towards sustainable development.

I would like to invite you to use the experience and partnerships you have created at this seminar and in your countries.

If I go back to my opening question: "What can **we do** to address these challenges?" Well... The key to the answer lies in our ability to SWITCH to a different approach. The SWITCH programme, through its research, pilot, demonstration and replication projects, is at the vanguard of what must become a more general switch in the way we all produce and consume.

Thank you for your attention.