# Connie Hedegaards tale ved EEA-konferencen "Eco-innovation: Potentials and challenges of tomorrow's technologies"

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| Connie Hedegaard<br>Miljøminister | 19. april 2005 | København |

High technology and the environment:_Denmark and the European Environmental Technologies Action Plan

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Danish Government and the Ministry for the Environment, it is a pleasure and an honour to welcome you all to Copenhagen.

There has been a huge interest in this conference – in fact such an interest, that we also have participants sitting in another room, following this session on TV-screens.

I'm sorry, that we have run out of seats in the main auditorium. But I am even more pleased to see that the subject "eco-innovation" has drawn such a large audience from all over Europe, - from business, politics as well as from the

science community.

This means that we have a unique opportunity to exchange views on how to make eco-innovation a European success.

The potential of eco-innovation is in many areas clear. But it cannot become a success by itself. It needs leadership. It needs cooperation.

We must form a strong, strategic alliance. We must show, that the environment represents a major contribution to Europe's ambitions to be the world's leading knowledge-based economy.

At the Spring Summit last month, the Heads of State wisely concluded that the environment is one of the three pillars of the Lisbon Strategy. Now is the time to deliver. And I strongly believe that we can deliver. The European Environmental Technology Action Plan – based on national actions - is the key instrument.

To me there is no doubt that the Danish road to jobs and growth runs through a more focused effort when it comes to eco-efficient technology.

Danish actions based on dialogue with stakeholders_However, the Danish Government will make time for intensive and open dialogue with all relevant stakeholders in the early stages. We want to ensure a solid basis of understanding and commitment before we launch specific initiatives.

And today's conference is an important stepping-stone in this process.

After the conference, I intent to expand the dialogue – also with the many stakeholders, who are not present with us today.

We must get a clear message through to other sectors, to the public, to the media, and to institutions, that eco-innovation is in fact "clean, clever and competitive" as the Dutch EU Presidency so elegantly put it.

Many of us in the environmental circles may well already be convinced – but we also need to convince our colleagues. Because we cannot successfully implement our ambitious efforts in the field of eco-innovation on our own.

We need co-operation across sectors in order to raise the funding necessary, and to have a significant and well-focused impact, - for example in the fight against climate change or dangerous emissions from traffic and farming.

The voice of business must be heard_In my view, the voice of business is one of the most important voices to be heard. With the present political agenda in Europe, and its primary focus on growth and employment, businesses have strong points to make. The challenge of making Europe competitive in the global economy is enormous. But as we can not compete on wages innovation, new ideas and new technology is what is required.

If the leaders of the corporate world say out loud that eco-efficient technology is good for both competitiveness and the environment, I'm sure that decision-makers in all sectors will listen.

So let me take this opportunity to appeal to the businesses-community to make it self heard.

We need you to spread the good word. We need your support, because at the end of the day, it is you, who will put new eco-efficient technologies on the market and make society more wealthy.

The power of the good example_One way of getting the message across is by telling good stories. Not fairy tales – but real-life stories of smart eco-innovation.

And the stories are out there: Non-toxic hull paint for boats, based on the idea of copying the structure of the skin of dolphins through nano-technology. Detergent with enzymes, that means we can wash our towels at 60 degrees instead of 90 degrees. Fuel-cells, bio-plastic, hybrid-cars. Concrete examples of eco-efficient solutions, that are understandable, appealing and within reach. These are not solutions for the future, they are right here, right now.

One should not under estimate the power of the good example. And at the same time, one should remember, that as long as we speak of eco-efficient technology in broad, political terms, many people would not get the point. And you can't blame them. We must be clear and specific in our way of speaking.

The message is really quite simple. Countries throughout the world are facing many of the same environmental problems. Those who deliver the smart solutions first, will benefit immensely. And so will the environment.

Challenges and risks must be identified – and overcome_Today's headline is "Potentials and challenges of tomorrow's technologies". I think I have already illustrated that potentials are great. As for the challenges and risks, we have a responsibility to identify them with precision – in order to overcome them.

In our preparations for this conference, the Danish Ministry of Environment asked leading researchers to investigate potentials and challenges for Denmark and the environment in three main areas of technology: nanotechnology,

biotechnology and information technology. Three potential areas of innovation which are also being explored by the EU.

The report, which was published last week, shows that high technology is in fact very promising in terms of sustainable development. Let me name just a few potentials:

_. Using nano-technology we can substitute dangerous chemicals.

_. Using IT we can reduce transportation, and

_. using industrial biotechnology, - such as enzymes for instance, we can reduce energy consumption.

But the report also states that the environmental potentials are often not considered in the innovation process, - and that a lot of barriers have to be broken down in order to release these potentials.

Environmental risks in high technology are many. In the field of IT, we know that computers and other electronic devices produce electro-smog, that may be

harmful to our health. And we know the problems of electronic waste containing dangerous chemicals.

With regard to an emerging technology such as nanotechnology, we don’t have a clear picture on the possible environmental impact. The regulation if therefore equally un-identified.

As for biotechnology, the debate has been going on for many years, all over the world.

We clearly have a responsibility not to be seduced by the potentials and thereby forget the risks.

Promoting new, green technology also means setting up the relevant regulation and collecting the information we need to evaluate the risks to nature and humans.

The responsibility of governments_In September last year I met with a group of high-profile Danish companies to discuss eco-innovation. I was pleased to note that they agreed that the potentials were there, even though many of them were not what we traditionally categorize as "green" companies.

One of the directors made an important point, when I asked how we could strengthen innovation. He said: You should point out the problems. Then we will deliver the solutions. The world might not be that simple, when it comes down to realities. But in broad terms, I agree. There will be a division of labour. Governments and politicians will push for solutions, and businesses will have to deliver.

It is the responsibility of governments to identify the priorities and set up the right framework. This will be another important component in my approach to Danish actions on promoting eco-innovation.

Within the next two months I plan to have organised a series of meeting with key companies in Denmark, relevant to identify feasible technological solutions to the very main environmental problems.

The environmental problems_So what are the environmental problems? I will not go into detail here, but climate change, agriculture and human health related to the environment are areas where we rather rapidly together have to find better solutions.

To the many foreign participants today, I should perhaps explain that in Denmark we have a rather pressing challenge in handling the huge pig-production. We produce some 25 mill. pigs – compared to 5 mill. inhabitants! – and this large industry is causing a big environmental impact.

Regulation is not new in the field. Certainly not. But it is an example showing that applied green technology can make the difference between a viable industry and one that is not.

So, in the fields of climate, agriculture and human health, smart solutions and intelligent regulations are vital. Without them, we will never be able to look our children and grandchildren in the eye. We are risking irreparable damage to health and the environment.

And yes, I mentioned just three areas - not because other areas are unimportant, but because I believe that we should not try to concentrate special efforts on all the problems at the same time. We should pinpoint the main problems, try and make a difference there - and then move on.

Matching problems and solutions_Another important step will be to match problems and solutions. Many Danish companies are competent in the fields I mentioned earlier, - but of course we will need to co-ordinate our work with other EU partners.

And we will work to identify areas, where common EU-regulation is called for: To enhance progress and to remove barriers to progress.

As part of the process, I will ask businesses to make clear, what contributions they can make to solve the environmental problems we prioritise.

Danish actions should focus on incentives that can increase demand for new technologies. We will explore the opportunities in new regulation and other instruments to enhance green innovation.

The goal is to create a framework that inspires and attracts companies to do their best. And at the same time to create stable conditions that allow for long-term planning and strategic investment.

Eco-innovation could be a turning point_Eco-innovation is not the answer to all our prayers. We still need a wide range of classic environmental policies. But in many ways, eco-innovation represents a turning point.

If we succeed, the environment will no longer be seen as merely an extra consideration and an expense. It will rightfully be seen as a driving force in making Europe more prosperous and a better place to live.

I wish you all a fruitful and inspirational conference. With the open discussion

that Jacqueline McGlade emphasised in her welcoming statement. Europe needs your contribution.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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Det Konservative Folkeparti, EU, Politisk tale

**URI**
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