

EU/US LOW CARBON ENERGY DIALOGUE CALIFORNIA/WASHINGTON

Interview with Alejo Vidal-Quadras

The trip to the USA was a great success of the EEF. First of all because many MEPs participated, and also because it came at a very timely moment, as energy and climate change are top priorities of current European policies. The opportunity to exchange views on those subjects in California and in Washington was extremely useful for all members.

We are presently discussing in the European Parliament two decisive legislative packages: one on climate change and one on the energy market. The direct contact with representatives of utilities, of public bodies, of legislators that are involved in energy policies was very informative and we could get extremely updated and useful information from them. Particularly in California about green energy (geothermal, solar, wind) and improvement of energy efficiency; we were impressed by the successes in that State on energy saving and efficiency and the use of renewables. Of course we also realised that apart from these great successes, for which the people of California are to be congratulated, we also knew that a significant part of the electricity consumed there comes from neighboring States where it is generated in coal fired power plants.

At the end of our visit, we became aware of the fact that the energy mix must be diversified. To pretend that the problem could be solved only by renewables and more efficiency is a fallacy. The late Loyola de Palacio used to say that “nuclear is not the solution but without it there is no solution.” In the USA they are clearly thinking of a nuclear renaissance. In the Congress, where we discussed with several Senators and Congress persons, we were told that in the USA there is a very large programme of licensing new nuclear power plants of the third generation technology that can be European, American or other. The licensing procedures have been optimized: simplified without compromising safety. They told us that in the next five to six years they expect something like 30 applications of which 20 or so will be accepted. This is something Europe has to be aware of as we cannot be idealistic or believe in utopias; we must implement in the next decade energy policies that are based on several pillars: renewables, energy efficiency, nuclear. To think there is a silver bullet in energy is a mistake. We need a whole set of solutions, and no source can be left aside. We need all of them, in particular nuclear because it is competitive, low carbon and ensuring security of supply.

We visited both the West Coast and the East Coast; different societies, different philosophies, different concepts, but the same conclusions: energy is a big priority, climate change must be addressed with a realistic approach, and any project or vision that ignores the realities is condemned right from the start. All MEPs in the delegation were extremely pleased by this visit, one of the most successful organised by the Forum. We now must apply all the lessons we learnt during this trip.

This visit could be renewed in the near future to see how the projects and ideas have developed.