

Opening statement

The Global Perspective of Biofuels

I would like to welcome all of you to what I believe will be an interesting and fruitful seminar about some of the challenges that confront us when we now strive to develop the future European bioenergy policies.

As you probably know, biofuels is a theme that tends to cause heated discussions in the Parliament. What I think is most important is that we do not take a too simplified approach to this issue. It makes no sense to be against all kinds of biofuels, but it also makes no sense to uncritically appraise all kinds of biofuels. We need to insist on quality, on high environmental standards as well as social standards. Today we can engage in an open discussion about the possibilities and limitations to both current and future policies.

The title of the seminar "the Global perspective of biofuels" underlines that European biofuels policies need to be understood and approached in a global perspective. We cannot ignore that what we decide in Europe has repercussions for the rest of the world. And equally what happens in the rest of the world influences the European possibilities and policies.

Personally I think we should not be so afraid of the biofuels. I think the Brazilian example shows many positive elements; and I think that it could be a benefit for third world countries to produce these fuels as well as biomass. But of course we have to closely examine the impact of the proposed target and we have to create a system that encourages the use of good biofuels.

I think one of the challenges is that the sustainability criteria proposed by the Commission are insufficient. First of all because they set a too low threshold for greenhouse gas reduction, secondly because they overlook the important aspect of social sustainability, and finally because they do not at all address the issues of water use and soil management.

The Commission has proposed 35 % greenhouse gas reduction, but this seems very unambitious. Would we really start this huge investment and development programme to only reach a 35 % gain in greenhouse gasses? And isn't it almost contradictory to set a threshold that will allow almost all biofuels to be approved? What is then the purpose of the threshold? I think we need to set a more ambitious reduction target - for example 50 % - to ensure that we are promoting the best biofuels and to give stronger incentives for the development of second generation biofuels.

I hope these are some of the questions that we can address today as well as many other questions of the environmental, social and agricultural impacts of these policies.

I would now to like to pass the floor to David McConnell from Trinity College in Dublin, who will introduce the seminar and the speakers.