

Distinguished Ministers and delegates,
Dear Carole, dear Camille,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As president of the non profit organization „Oekozer Pafendall“, it is my great pleasure today to warmly welcome you all to our Centre and to thank the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the European Union and, in particular, the Ministry of sustainable development, for taking the initiative of the present visit.

As a matter of fact – by visiting our Centre – you dared to descend – *even by foot I heart* - from the of Kirchberg plateau (that means from the highest European decision level) in order to bravely enter the very heart of NGO's nestled **down here** in one of the most picturesque suburbs of the city of Luxembourg. *Thank you for your courage!*

Our centre brings together a whole range of NGO's,

- first of all: the « **Mouvement Ecologique** » (the Ecological Movement), which represents the national unit of „Friends of the Earth“- with activities on all areas of sustainable development. Also, its President, Mrs Blanche Weber, will address some more political words to you later on (*I worry, they will not be so pleasant than mine*);

- then: the **Oekozer structure itself**, with its conference and seminar facilities, a library and a charming *bistro*, and a series of consultancy services – covering various fields and initiating a lot of innovative projects in:

- (the) *agricultural* area – i.e. projects carried out together with the „Young farmers association” – aiming more sustainable agriculture by promoting leguminous plants, reducing of the use of pesticides...

- (the) *environmental* area: ecolabelling - a certification scheme for hotels and camping sites, promoting green meetings - congress tourism respecting sustainable development criteria and the “Oekotopten”-platform being the Luxembourgish part of the European project „Topten ACT”...

- projects in the area of *sustainable housebuilding*: we have initiated a system of certification of sustainable construction and related financial incentives; seminars...

- *energy / climate* area: we provide advice services to a series of municipalities participating in the climate pact with the Luxembourg Government.

- The **Luxembourg branch of Climate Alliance** is another NGO present in this center: an alliance of 35 municipalities (among them the most important ones) and two NGO promoting the exchange of good practices concerning the reduction of Greenhouse gas emissions.

- Furthermore we have here: the **Luxembourgish branch of the European Cyclist Federation**, with its projects aiming to establish the bicycle as a means of sustainable transport
- Then: the **Luxembourgish branch of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)** – promoting a chain 'of custody' for the wood sector according to set criteria of sustainability
- And – last but not least: the **Vegan Society Luxembourg**.

Moreover, our Centre is open to any other organization of the civil society.

This is really an exciting mix of future-oriented movements...

But: The organisations that are grouped in this Centre obviously do not at all want to act as a substitute to action of public authorities, but – thanks to their volunteers and collaborators - as a **kind of yeast, as a lever aiming a more sustainable society**. The very basis of our action is the concept of **strong sustainability**, which - unlike weak sustainability - puts the focus on democratic, ecological, social and cultural scales over economic gains. Our convictions take in consideration first of all the limits of our planet, the equality of chances between North and South and between present and future generations. This of course while trying to create synergies between the economic, the social and the environmental challenges.

We try to implement *down here* bottom up – realistic and utopic alternatives, hoping that politicians up there on Kirchberg plateau – *that means you in particular* - will take up the torch ... Even the best projects have in fact limited impact if they do not lead to **structural changes** in policy.

Traditionally, in a small country like ours, most of our projects are realized in an **harmonious collaboration with the political authorities**. The Luxembourg State - in particular the Ministry of sustainable development - and the City of Luxembourg, made possible the construction of this building according to passive house standard and sustainable building materials. Other projects I mentioned - benefit from a partnership, a convention or another financial aid allocated by the Luxembourg State and sometimes by the European Union.

But: dear Ministers and delegates, ladies and gentlemen, DO NOT mistake:

As authentic non-governmental organizations, we keep the **spirit of a complete political independence**. Our multiple actions, positions, meetings ... are the proof of this independence. And I hope that all this movements will also preserve their **creativity**, as well as the heart they invest into their commitment...

For politicians, it may sometimes seem **contradictory** to put at the disposal of NGOs the material and the financial means that – at the end – might be – eventually - used against them.

But, I do believe that THIS assumed contradiction is the very foundation of democracy: allowing everyone to express their views, to develop alternatives, to introduce new ways for societal development... It is one of the often neglected

aspects of the sustainable development paradigm: **the strengthening of the participation of citizens and civil society at the local, the national as well as the supranational level!**

Which leads me to my conclusion: We are today faced with the negative trends of deregulation of all types also in the European Union (!), with the increasing pressure of economic and financial lobbies, and with the hazards of a unbridled globalization.

We – or I should say you, dear Ministers and delegates – should ensure, not only at a national but also on the European level – the further strengthening of the means of the committed associative movements!

Europe has to provide civil society with an enhanced framework and with more important means – so they can assert their opinion on an equal basis compared to economical stakeholders.

In fact this would be a real chance for an European Union of and for Citizens, by enabling national NGOs to better relay the discussions on European policy on a national level. And in particular those in the field of environmental and sustainable development...

Angela Merkel once said: “*Scheitert der Euro, scheitert Europa*” (‘If the Euro Fails, Europe Fails’).

With all due respect for the economic and the integration importance of the Euro, I take the liberty of completing this statement with another one, which integrates also democratic, social and cultural aspects: „*Europa wird scheitern, wenn es sich nicht zu einer demokratischeren, oekologischeren und sozialeren Einheit weiterentwickelt*“. To express in a positive way: “*The success of the european idea depends on it evolution to a union of democratic, sustainable, social and cultural values*“.

Dear ministers and delegates of the Member States of the European Union, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a pleasant stay in our country.