



## *View from Brussels*

# Agassi meets DG TREN

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Transport is responsible for 70% of oil consumption in the EU. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transport represent about a quarter of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the EU. The EU's dependence on oil now exceeds 50% and the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that every 10% increase in the price of oil causes a loss of 0.5% of global GDP (approximately €255bn). So how is it possible to imagine an energy policy that will result in a reduction in emissions, and enhanced security of supply and competitiveness without addressing the problem of transport?

The European Commission is obviously highly concerned about the climate and energy problem, but, bizarrely, it treats transport policy completely separately from the other issues. Well, yes, efforts are being made to promote “sustainable mobility” and to make transport “greener”, but this is hardly the same as integrating transport policy into climate policy, in the same way as is done with energy policy.

Road transport is by far the main emitter of greenhouse gas from transport. In 2006, it accounted for 71% of all greenhouse gas emissions from transport. This subject, however, is still taboo in Brussels because all attempts to radically reduce CO<sub>2</sub> from transport are opposed by the powerful automobile and lorry transport lobbies. Governments, too, have everything to gain as far as the automobile industry is concerned: industrial employment opportunities and fiscal revenue from the automobiles themselves as well as from fuel. Then of course there is the fear of lorry driver protests in some countries.

In short, it's in the governments' interests to maintain the status quo. This situation is not about to change, despite numerous attempts by green lobbies. Neither is there a real policy to promote public transport at a European level. The “American dream” of freedom and social status gained from owning a car is deeply anchored in the human psyche. Altering this paradigm is not really a realistic option, despite the wishes of environmentalists. In this respect, China and India are following the way of the west.

So what is to be done? Can the cars themselves be changed? Zero-emission cars offer a solution, but even the Greens in the European Parliament believe that ‘despite initial euphoria, the prospect of cars powered by hydrogen fuel cells is no longer viewed as being a realistic option in the medium-term’.

Enter the electric vehicle. The EV has recently sparked a lot of interest in Brussels. The guest star at the DG TREN Day (organised by the Directorate-General of Transport & Energy or DGTREN) in July was EV-leader Shai Agassi, featured elsewhere in this issue of EER. He would appear to have made a big impression. DG Research's latest call for tenders is entirely devoted to electric vehicle projects and the Commission and European Investment Bank have indicated that future recovery aid for the automobile industry must be dependent on efforts to develop “green” cars.

So, now we wait for the Commission to come up with a strategy for EVs. It has already expressed its views on hydrogen, biofuels, biomass, and thermonuclear fusion but not on electric cars. More work for the incoming European Commission which cannot afford to miss this boat. If we would hope one day to drive from Lisbon to Helsinki in an electric car, coordination is needed at the highest European level. ■