

TEN-T-Days 16. October 2013

Civil society-Voices to be heard

Civil Society - Voices to be heard, - that is my subject.

I sort of envy those who are able to speak with one voice, - firmly committed to one aim with the power of full conviction that they are right and the others are wrong. Black or white. Pro or contra.

That is not our business. In our Forum we have the voices, all of them: black and white and grey, most of all grey.

We: that is the **Dialogue Forum Fehmarnbelt Fixed Link**.

The Fixed Link is the projected tunnel between Germany and Denmark, nearly 20 km long, railway + autobahn, probably the biggest infrastructure project of northern Europe. Not to forget the road and railway connecting the tunnel with Lübeck going through the beautiful landscape of Ostholstein but also through densely populated areas with the touristic infrastructure of Baltic Coast Sea Resorts. The project is based on a bilateral agreement between Germany and Denmark that was ratified by both the Danish and German Parliament leaving the land of Schleswig Holstein with the not so easy task of implementation.

The **Dialogue Forum** is a sort of round table where representatives of all interested parties meet 4 to 5 times per annum. The participants include proponents like the project managers as well as opponents like local initiatives, several NGO's. There are also business circles, tourist organizations, labor and employers unions, local mayors, - in short: all those being affected are meeting those that affect them.

And I am the chairman or "**Sprecher**" of that Forum.

Does it work? Do we produce results and if so how, or do we merely talk, fight and agree to disagree, - that are the questions I would like to discuss with you.

I was more or less thrown into that Forum in August 2011 by the then Ministerpräsident Carstensen. At that time the demonstrations against the railway project in Stuttgart, "Stuttgart 21" as we call it, were at their height and the election campaign in Schleswig Holstein was about to start. No wonder, the MP wanted to keep the tunnel question out. In September 2011 the Forum had its first meeting.

By the way: it did not really help him. Schleswig-Holstein is now governed by a coalition of SPD, the Greens and SSW, the Danish Minority. Very interesting, because they are split on the tunnel question: local SPD against, Landes- as well as Federal SPD pro, Greens and SSW were against during their campaign. Now they have inherited the problem. They did it with a remarkable phrase, I am citing the SSW Minister of European Affairs: We are no Banana Republic, so we fulfill treaties and anyway it is too late to stop it.

That was last year. This year we had federal elections. Did the tunnel play a role? Locally yes, in the region not really. Did the opposition of local candidates play a role? Here are the facts: the only one pro was the CDU Candidate gaining 2% more than the Landes CDU. The SPD candidate, who was unlike her party against, was 0,5% under average and the green candidate 0,1% under average.

Lesson No 1 for the Forum: keep party-politics out, and keep out of party Politics. Governments might change and we need the confidence of all. And for the Government it might help to have that problem dealt with by an independent forum. This is why the Forum, although installed under a conservative government, is mentioned in the coalition agreement of the new coalition.

This is typical for many infrastructural projects: Those who decide are not those that are affected. The people that benefit are not those who pay, - in terms of money and/or quality of life. This is true especially in projects of national or European dimension like here where the Federal Parliament was involved. Can it be otherwise? Can we leave a decision like that to the region or to the people on the spot? As chairman I have to be neutral and better keep out. I can however cite the one and only green Ministerpräsident in Germany,

MP Kretschmann of Baden Württemberg, - remember: Stuttgart 21 - who recently stated that there can be no regional veto against a decision falling into the responsibility of a Parliament.

With the Dialogforum we have however found a way to let the **affected become participants** of the process, not in the decision making in the beginning but - better late than never - during the implementation.

We do have a word to say because **we unite the concentrated knowhow of problems and solutions**. If and when we agree, whenever we speak with one voice, we do have influence. I would like to mention two examples: It was our persistence that finally led DB to admit that the existing bridge over the Fehmarnsund was insufficient for the traffic to be expected as a result of which we called on the government start the process for a new link. And it was on our initiative that the Landesregierung asked the Federal Government to ask for a new evaluation of the project.

These are examples for our way of work. We ask questions, we get answers, sometimes insufficient answers, and then we make clear that there is a point that needs follow up. Thus we gain the confidence of the people that we take their problems serious.

This is why **transparency** is so important. We ask questions, the project managers have to answer. But we too have to be transparent. That is why all our meetings are public, can be followed by live stream and always be checked by viewing on demand. There is a question and answer round for the public at the end of every meeting. All the questions and answers and many relevant documents are to be found on our website.

Another important factor is **independence**. We have our own budget, we decide ourselves on our agenda and we keep out of party-politics.

Does it work?

Well we just had our second anniversary. But no champagne, not even Sekt. Why? Because nobody is really happy. Neither the planners, who want to concentrate on their project without having to answer critical questions, nor the opponents who try everything to stop the project and not even the chairman who is caught between two stools.

In our meeting last week the opposing local initiatives demanded the forum to concentrate on the question whether the project is sensible at all. Immediately the farmers union stood up and criticized that we lose far too much time on the “if” question and should rather concentrate on practical measures how to minimize the impacts. And the chairman thought: we have to do both.

There are **centrifugal forces**.

We are neither able nor do we want to turn the pros into contras or the contras into pros. Research shows, that on the contrary, the longer you discuss a problem, the more the opponents become convinced that they are right and the others are wrong. For a very simple reason: each side listens only to those arguments supporting their view because they are right and the others are wrong. And: for the local initiatives it is easier to stay with their “no” than to enter into discussion of practical questions. I do understand that: it must be very difficult for them to participate in the decisionmaking process on where the railway should go: if not close to their house then close to the neighbor’s? This gets more and more difficult the closer we come to the realization phase.

Another yet not answered question is whether the local initiatives become more realistic the closer we come to the building phase. That remains to be seen.

We saw this problem right from the beginning and therefore wrote into our basic principles that participation in the forum requires to be ready for dialogue but not to give up your opinion. By the way: our principles are worth reading. They consist of 14 paragraphs only. You find them on our website.

What then holds us together?

- We discuss both, practical questions as well as the if question.

- Every participant is equal. We do not vote. We want consensus where ever possible. And in addition: how to weight the different interests? Should environment have more or less votes than economy?

And: Most important: everyone profits:

- There is **public demand**. Our audience during meetings is always fully booked. The people living near the railway want to know what is going on, what will happen to them, are there solutions for their concerns.
- The **project managers** know that they need public confidence if they want to avoid situations like in Stuttgart 21.
- **The local initiatives** have realized that the Forum offers an additional platform to voice their concerns. By participating they do not lose any of their other possibilities: they can demonstrate, they can go to court, they can negotiate compensation.

The only one suffering is the chairman, falling between two stools. But there he has to be I do not ask for your sympathy. I do this voluntarily. And I have some experience: I took part in the students movement in 68. I then felt right, absolutely right, and all the others were wrong, absolutely wrong. And I was chairman or chef de file as it was called for the EU in CSCE Conferences, Helsinki Process. We had endless discussions of nearly all west-east problems without having the feeling that anyone was able to convince the other side. And suddenly the iron curtain fell, Germany was united, Europe was united and we are able to meet here in Tallinn.

Let me be very clear: Our Forum is a process. It is not the solution. We can try to point out the problems. And there are problems:

- Gains and losses are too far apart. People in the region feel that they are affected by problems they have no influence on and cannot cope with. One example: if you have a house in the region you cannot sell it anymore because nobody knows where the railway will be.
- Environmental Problems are far from being solved. Railway and noise is at the core of the problems, an important factor that has to be tackled. There are technical solutions, they have to be implemented.

I am optimistic that the Dialogforum also in the future will confront politicians and managers with these problems and many others. We will continue to attempt pooling voices into one voice that must be listened to.

There are emotions involved. I fully understand that. If I have one wish free it would be: Let us be more polite in dealing with each other.