

Keynote Speech I: Prof. Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker

Distinguished author of “Factor Five” and widely reputed spokesman of the green economy, Prof. Dr. Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker delivered an excellent keynote speech at the opening of the Freiburg Forum on Environmental Governance 2011. His seminal work proposes a transformation of the Global Economy through “80% improvements in resource productivity” and envisages green economy as the necessary 6th wave of technological development. Prof. Weizsäcker puts into question the possibility of a Kuznets curve for contemporary developing countries, reluctant to develop environmental policies because they expect wealth increase and CO₂ output to decouple at a certain level of economic development. His encouraging findings are that the developed countries are able to help the developing ones to “shortcut the dirty hill and also profit”. The three options available would be to reduce the carbon intensity of energy, to reduce the energy intensity of wealth and to reduce wealth. “Factor Five” was written in collaboration with a group of Australian scientists and displays the technologies and policies that will lead to five-fold improvements through reducing the current levels of CO₂, energy and wealth by a fifth. Prof. Weizsäcker declared himself a supporter of the per capita equal Carbon emission rights, a concept proposed by the Indian PM Manmohan Singh and an opponent of the current neo-liberal economy.

The public was eager to engage the speaker in a subsequent Q&A session about the role of the US in the transformation of the Global Economy, the lack of involvement of developing countries in the climate debate, technology transfer, and the efficiency of Clean Development Mechanisms.

The organizers, MEG class of 2011, felt deeply honored to have Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker’s insightful speech open the “Inspiring Change towards the Green Economy” conference.