

*CONTRA: 10 Minutes talk at the European Youth Debating Competition for a better future*

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Dear distinguished Sponsors of the European Youth Debate Forum,  
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear young students and contributors.

It is a great honour to be here and I wish to thank Plastic Europe and EPCA for their invitation and congratulate them for the nice venue here in the "Reihnische Landestheater" in Neuss.

I am here today invited as an expert for marine litter and in the function as president of the NGO DEEPWAVE – the organization for marine conservation from Hamburg. I will also be part of the jury and I look very much forward to hear this year contributions. I know from the final European debate in Rom back in the year 2012 how excellent all your talks will be.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen.

Marin Luther (\*1) was a man of wisdom: When he was asked what he would do in front of the dark times of anger, hunger and pest diseases back in the medieval century, he answered: "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree."

Did he say: I would plant a plastic tree?

No. Although metaphorical meant to give people hope during bad times of helplessness, he particularly pointed to a green apple tree. How marvellous!

He is right with the apple tree because this tree is giving us - besides happiness - a lot of things to wonder about. Just imagine all the flowers – right now you can see them in the parks outside. And there are millions of them which are snowing around us in the air. So many flowers and so less apples from one tree! And you might think: What a joy is such an apple tree - but what a waste of flowers!

1

Now look at today's world. A lot of the issues haven't been solved since Luther's times 500 years ago, unfortunately. There is still hunger in the

world, there are diseases, and there is terrible hate and war. And there are all the 7.5 billion people on the planet demanding health and peace and a well-being,.

The way they are doing it - like we all do - is to consume the resources of the world. Minerals, oil, wood, food and fish are plundered from the Earth.

And we are quite good in it: 90 Percent of the big fish like sharks and tuna have been fished out of the oceans. More than the half of global fish stocks have collapsed by over-fishing.

And where did they go?

We have eaten them all.

150 species go extinct every day!

Not enough to that: we are also destroying the oceans with pollution! Already 50 Percent of the coral reefs have been destroyed by polluted waters. And climate change is right now killing the northern Great Barrier Reef. I am a scientific diver and I was diving there and for me it is very sad to see this happen.

2

Faster and faster has to be our economy – bigger and bigger are the problems for nature.

Think about marine plastic litter: Already 150 million tonnes of plastics are floating in the ocean and each year we are adding another 8 to 20 million tonnes into the sea according to UNEP data. And to this now add another million litres of marine diesel oil. Yes plastic litter and the heavy fuels from container ships are the same pollution - made from oil. And add to it the catastrophes like the “Deepwater Horizon” oil spill and the daily oil-spills on the Niger coast and worldwide.

In the end you will see no hope for the blue planet and the oceans. Sadly to say, but we will leave a dirty, poisoned and empty sea to our children and the next generations.

Well: “to plant a tree” – it is today as important as in former times.

3

Because, a tree is never a wasteful thing. What all the flowers are telling us, is what we call the circular economy of nature. Since there is no such thing as “waste” in nature. Everything will be used again and again and

again. It will be recycled and will support a number of other ecosystem services - the leaves are creating the soil, the soil is giving bacteria the habitat, the bacteria are filtering the water and so on.

In order to protect the oceans - the blue lung of our planet - and in order to keep our nature intact and free from plastic, we thus have to avoid the waste. Waste we are producing today in a very old fashion way. Nylon, Acryl, Neoprene, Polyethylene - these chemicals were all invented in the 30ties of the last century!

Today we have to invent new plastics – we need polymers based on starch from corn, oil from or algae and lignin, fatty acids, proteins etc. from biomass. These “biobased” materials produce the platform chemicals such as methanol, ethanol and glycerine used in petrochemical pathways. This only can be the way out of the fossil fuels. And I ask you, why should a fishing net last for 400 years? Once lost it is a ghost net in the waters. Why not use degradable materials instead?

4

If we want to survive and we want to have the great transformation of our society which respects nature - and which is not making a junkyard out of our oceans which is our life guarantee - we now need a new technology apart from petro-oils. We have to leave the oil in the ground also as a matter of the drastic climate change.

So we need better science and better technology. And we need a visionary thinking - the picture of the apple tree is giving us the answer.

During the World Economic Forum in Davos in March this year this was proposed also from the Mc Arthur Foundation (\*2). They called it “The New Plastic Economy”.

The growth of the plastic production may rise from today’s 311 million tons to over a billion tons in the year 2015. And taking no efforts this could mean: in the year 2050 there is probably more plastic in the ocean than fish!

So in order to stop this trend, global action is required to a transition to a new plastic economy. We have to create an effective after-use of plastic products. We have to reduce our dependence of oil. And we have to drastically reduce leakage into the natural systems.

5

Dear students,

“How would you imagine your future with or without the petrochemical industry and plastics?” is the question you have to answer today.

I wish you good luck with your pro and cons for this important debate.

Here today is a very good platform for discussions and I am sure you will take this offer and help us with solutions for the benefit of all our future.

And like a Jedi-Knight from Star Wars may say: Let the Power be always with you.

Let me say:

Let the power of Nature be always with you.

Thank You.

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Amendments:

\*1 Although “the apple tree” citation is attributed to M. Luther it may be originally not by him.

\*2 Source: “The New Plastics Economy: Rethinking the future of plastics” Report by the World Economic Forum and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation

<https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/publications/the-new-plastics-economy-rethinking-the-future-of-plastics>