



**Environment at the crossroads.  
Aiming for a sustainable future.**  
Gulbenkian Conference 2009  
27 and 28 October

*The perspective from Europe*

**Alex Ellis**, British Ambassador, Lisbon

In this session I will focus on the evolution of European Union policies in relation to climate change and energy. I will do so from the standpoint of an official working for the President of the European Commission who was involved in the overall construction of the proposals known as the 20/20/20 package; with all the technical expertise which a history degree confers. I will firstly consider why the issues of climate change and energy have become so important to the European Union, albeit in different ways and at different times; why the nature of the problems which Europe faces in relation to both issues, and indeed the vary nature of the issues themselves, make them especially appropriate for EU deliberation and decision. I will also look at the popular/political element to these issues which again has encouraged the EU institutions, and many (but not all) national European governments to focus on them.

I will look at the nature of the European Union itself, and consider whether this unusual hybrid organisation is well placed to act on certain sustainability issues given its nature, the powers it has and its membership. I will consider whether the EU is correct to consider that its decisions can become a pole of attraction for others, given that any EU decision is a compromise produced by differing interests within the organisation.

I will then look at the acts of persuasion and negotiation performed by the EU: a) internally, what has the EU achieved in the area of climate change and energy? Are its targets credible and do they alter behaviour in a way which leads to the outcomes expressed by EU leaders? How have policies been constructed and evolved over time? How did energy become so much more relevant in the EU sustainability debate in recent years?; b) externally, the development of EU policies in the international context and the affirmation of those policies in that context – UN, G8/20 etc. How much influence does the EU have?

Finally I will reflect on what this experience tells about how the EU works, whether the rest of the world behaves in similar ways to the EU – and to the extent that it doesn't, what that means for the EU.



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**Alexander Ellis** is the British Ambassador to Portugal since September 2007. Between 2005 and 2007 he was an adviser to the President of the European Commission on energy, climate change, competition, development, trade and strategy. Prior to that, he worked on EU and economic issues in Madrid in the British Embassy; in London as head of the Foreign Office's team for the negotiations for the 2004 EU enlargement, as well as EU/Turkey relations; in Brussels in the UK Representation to the EU working on successively on the negotiations to establish the euro, the 7 year budget, then institutional issues including the Treaty of Nice; and in Lisbon as a junior member of the political team in the British Embassy. He started his Foreign Office career as part of the team supporting the transition to multi party democracy in South Africa, following the release of Nelson Mandela.

Before joining the Foreign Office, Alex Ellis had taught in the UK and India.