Koji Omi – Net worker in the fight against CO₂

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It is a little embarrassing to guide the friendly, elderly man and his delegation through the construction-site of our redaction building. Until last summer Koji Omi was Minister of Finances, since one quarter of a century he is member of the House of Representatives for the governing liberal–democratic party LDP. Three times he was member of the Cabinet as Minister of Finance as well as Minister for Science- and Technology-Policy and for Economy planning. He is considered as one of the most influential politicians in Japan in the field of development of science and technology.

The improvised reception is politely overseen by Mr. Omi. Instead he is enthusiastic about his Sunday walk along the lake to get here to Falkenstrasse. After that, the atmosphere gets much more businesslike. Mr. Omi stays in Zürich to prepare the fifth annual meeting of the STS–Forum “Science and Technology in Society Forum”, which he founded in 2004. The forum shall take place in fall in Kyoto. Around 600 scientists, politicians, economic leaders and media representatives of 70 countries will deal with the question of "Light and Shadow of Science and Technology". Mr. Omi states that the reason for the fact that the preparatory meeting takes place in Zürich and not as usual in London or Paris is based on an invitation of the ETH–council and its former President Alexander Zehnder.

The STS–forum can be compared with the World Economic Forum in Davos. The goal of Mr. Omi is to hold an open dialogue on the question how to use the positive sides of scientific and technological progress for a sustainable development of the society and to get the negative consequences under control. It’s true that progress leaded to prosperous economy and to clearly better living-circumstances. But only one part of the population can profit from this and the prices are ethically problematic developments, security- and environmental crisis. Mr. Omi mentions chemical and nuclear weapons as negative examples
or the cloning of humans which endangers human dignity. E-mail and television helped to globalize the economy but it also contributed to a rapid increase of energy consumption and to a destabilization between oxygen and carbon dioxide.

Mr. Omi is convinced that the main challenge for the time being is Global Warming. The Kyoto-Protocol, which is expiring in 2012, only covers 30% of the worldwide CO₂-emissions. It is important to create new regulations and laws which include also those countries which are not yet integrated in the process. The Forum wants to support this Post-Kyoto-Process. The key to the solutions lies, according to Koji Omi, in nuclear energy - as long as it is used in a safe way and handled by competent and responsible hands. Mr. Omi is aware of the fact that nuclear energy - except in France - is not very popular in Europe. "We try to change this opposing attitude, because there will be no solution without nuclear energy" declares Mr. Omi. Of course this does not exclude alternative energies, especially not the improvement of energy-efficiency, but this alone would not be sufficient. The actual controversy on bio-fuel, which shall also be held in Kyoto, is the perfect example for this situation.

Mr. Omi is convinced that humanity is endangering its own future if we do not learn to live in harmony with nature. Considering the circumstances of Global Warming, there is no guarantee for a surviving of mankind. One way would be to renounce consumption. That's quite an unrealistic scenario for economist. He expects solutions from science and technology. Still we should not leave all solutions to scientists. People from all kinds of sectors are needed to consider all these problems as their own problems. The goal of STS-Forum is to establish a net between these people. Mr. Omi wishes that the STS-Forum shall not only be a conference but that it grows into a movement - to a worldwide movement. Borders are only marked on the maps. We have to save the planet.