

OWWF discusses the future of the automotive industry

"Automotive industry, Quo vadis?" - this was the title of a panel discussion held by the OstWestWirtschaftsForum Bayern on 3rd June 2019 at the Ministry of Home Affairs in Nuremberg. The speakers from politics and industry unanimously emphasized that Germany has the innovative strength to remain the leading provider of modern mobility in the future. Instead of focusing purely on the electric car, the panel saw the future of the automobile particularly in fuel cell technology - which requires significantly less overexploitation of raw materials and rare materials, particularly in the Third World, and at the same time works cheaply, quietly and reliably. The public debate about fraudulent manipulations by industry and consequently about environmental protection and compliance with legal limits has harmed the German automotive industry, but is now also leading to a mood of optimism and a new willingness to innovate.

At the beginning of the event in a fully occupied hall of the Ministry of Home Affairs, after the welcome by the North Bavarian representative of the OWWF, Yvonne Zienert, Sandro Kirchner, Member of the State Parliament, Chairman of the Committee for Economy, Regional Development, Energy, Media and Digitisation, spoke. He examined the problems arising from the forthcoming restructuring from a political point of view. Martin Glößlein of LEONI Bordnetzsysteme highlighted the challenges facing the automotive industry and its suppliers.

In the subsequent panel discussion, the participants deepened their perspectives on the topic: "Our automotive industry is in a defensive role in this debate," stated entrepreneur Peter Weber. MdL Sandro Kirchner (CSU) adds that Bavaria operates "genuine environmental protection", while the driving bans imposed by the courts are "pure symbolic politics". "At the moment we do not manage to comply with the limit values - but our automotive industry is working hard on solutions", says Dr.-Ing. Robert Schmitt from the Chamber of Industry and Commerce Nuremberg for Middle Franconia. Bill Holler, OWWF China consultant, emphasizes that "an open innovation that cannot be driven by the spirit of the age" is important to him. In this context, Martin Glößlein criticized the industry's failure, for example in fuel cell technology, which had already been developed by the manufacturers at the beginning of the millennium but then disappeared into the drawer.

The city of Nuremberg is also setting a good example: "As the city of Nuremberg, we do a lot for traffic and air quality in practice: We rely on good public transport, freight bicycles and also efficient and flowing traffic," says Nuremberg's economic consultant Dr. Michael Fraas. Fraas, who is also Managing Director of the "Forum Wirtschaft und Infrastruktur der Metropolregion Nordbayern", also emphasized the explosive nature of the topic for the region: More than 90,000 of the approx. 800,000 jobs in the German automotive industry - i.e. well over 10% - are located in northern Bavaria - especially the large supplier companies are important employers in the region.

In their summary, the panelists agreed: "Environmental protection will play a major role in the future, but social compatibility must be kept in mind. It is important to use one's own innovative strength, to find new approaches and also to implement them - fuel cells and synthetic fuels are mentioned here. At the same time, diesel and petrol technology must be made as low-polluting as possible through the consistent use of existing technologies so that they can continue to be used. It is also important to create a sensible mix of existing means of transport, an idea that scientists developed back in the 1980s. Finding the right balance between innovation, a clean environment and consideration for small and medium-sized enterprises is, from the point of view of the Round Table, the task for the stakeholders.