

TRANSITION OR MOBILITY? AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRK SPANIEL

Posted on March 30, 2023



The freedom we have experienced in recent decades to decide for ourselves when, where, and how we get

around will no longer be affordable for many people.

Category: [Interview](#)

Tags: [AfD](#), [cars](#), [combustion engine vehicles](#), [Dirk Spaniel](#), [e-fuels](#), [Green Deal](#), [synthetic fuels](#)

Dr. Dirk Spaniel, a veteran of the German automotive industry, recently sat down for an interview to discuss the ideological struggle of the Greens against the automobile—and the consequences for Europe. Dr. Spaniel studied chemical engineering in Clausthal-Zellerfeld and mechanical engineering at RWTH Aachen, and worked for many years as a development engineer. He became a member of the German Bundestag in 2017, where he is currently the AfD policy-spokesman for transport.

Dr. Spaniel, from 2035 onwards, no combustion engines will be allowed in the EU, despite the fact that e-fuels could make such engines largely CO² neutral. Is there something other than the climate argument behind the so-called ‘transition’?

Clearly, with synthetic fuels, or ‘e-fuels’, cars with internal combustion engines could continue to be operated in a CO²-neutral way. Moreover, the supply network would already exist via the filling stations and the problem we have today—of spiralling energy costs for e-car owners—would not weigh so heavily. Despite these very sound arguments, however, the Greens and their stalwarts in the other parties strictly reject e-fuels. This shows me that their reasons are ideological, not rational. At least in part, the climate argument is a pretext. In any case, private transport will become more and more expensive. The freedom we have experienced in recent decades to decide for ourselves when, where, and how we

get around will no longer be affordable for many people, unless we can effectively oppose this policy throughout Europe.

In your view, what would be the necessary consequence for European civilians?

Mobility must remain affordable and, to ensure it, one must develop the most efficient and resourceful infrastructure. Taking the total costs, including environmental cost, into account, road transport remains essential for mobility. Directing investments into infrastructure and road transport leads to efficient mobility and great economic benefit. That would be the first measure.

The second point is simply to foster openness to technology. In doing so, we will recognise synthetic fuels as CO²-neutral. Everything else will follow from there. There will be competition for the best technology, and the electric car will also come under cost and reputational pressure. This will create the climate of innovation that we need. I personally believe that the internal combustion engine will ultimately prevail.

The German FDP entered the election campaign demanding an open-minded approach to engine technology. What has remained of this now that the government is in power?

The FDP has even written the preservation of the combustion engine, and the development of synthetic fuels, into its coalition agreement. Nevertheless, they cannot—or will not?—come good on the commitment. The FDP Transport Minister, Volker Wissing, has

failed us at the EU level. If an open-minded approach to technology and e-fuels had been more than just a campaign slogan, they could be pushed through at the EU, where Germany's influence is significant.

It's possible that, sometime soon, the EU Parliament could contain a majority of members with national and civic, rather than international and ideological concerns. To what extent do other EU countries support the green 'transition' and the end of the combustion engine?

Germany is exerting massive pressure here. A representative of the French transport committee, whom I explicitly asked about this, answered that they had not evaluated the draft decisions in detail. It was assumed that the Germans knew what they were doing.

If the German car industry goes to the wall, will that also have political repercussions in Europe?

As a result of these developments, Germany is increasingly becoming a transfer society. Transfer societies tend to nationalise their industries; and that is exactly what the European Union is actually striving for: more state control, more transfer payments. The nationalisation of industry will lead to greater centralisation at the EU level, which is definitely in the interest of the Brussels bureaucrats, and not necessarily in the interest of the liberal European parties.

How do you see the future of the German car industry?

You have to look at the future of the car industry in different ways. On the one hand, there are large corporations, which will relocate to countries with better conditions. This will lead to massive job losses in Germany and Europe, but not necessarily to negative business results for the respective corporations. Then there are the many supplier companies, which are often medium-sized, sometimes with fewer than 200 employees. They will not be able to simply relocate abroad, but, in some cases, will be forced to close. In the end, even more of the wealth creation in Europe will take place in the non-manufacturing sector. This in turn will lead to high economic volatility, since state-regulation will prevail, and one of the pillars of the economy will be research and development. But you can only develop things whose production processes you understand. And if the production processes no longer take place in Europe, it will become a big problem to maintain Europe's GDP through services. Great Britain has already experienced something similar.

Currently, Italy, France, Spain, the Czech Republic, and other European countries are also large players in the car industry. Do the problems described above apply mainly to Germany or also to these countries?

The countries mentioned have the advantage that energy costs are lower there than in Germany. That means they can benefit to some extent from relocations within Europe. But they are equally affected by corporate relocation outside Europe.