

“Solutions for climate change and social justice issues”

German Environmental Prize 2020 for economist Prof Dr Ottmar Edenhofer

Potsdam. The German Environmental Foundation (DBU) is presenting this year’s German Environmental Prize to one of the world’s most influential pioneer in the economic aspects of climate change: Professor Dr Ottmar Edenhofer (59), Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) and the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change (MCC) in Berlin, will receive EUR 250,000 in prize money. “Thanks to his excellent research, science-based political consulting, and his dedication, he is able to use an economic approach to offer solutions to climate change that also address social justice issues,” says DBU General Secretary Alexander Bonde. As it stands today, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier will present the award in Hannover on 25 October 2020.

Responsible, fair use of global common resources

Edenhofer understands how to reconcile economic, environmental, and social demands better than perhaps anyone else. “In this way, he has shown political decision-makers the way in which supposed conflicts of interest can be overcome,” emphasizes Bonde. Edenhofer is “a courageous trailblazer in politics” and he takes the decision-making problems in this field seriously. At the same time, he is known to be an “incorruptible problem-solver who never loses sight of the goal of advancing social change”. He is “unwaveringly guided by the prospect of responsible, fair use of global common resources such as the atmosphere and oceans”. Bonde: “It is thanks to him that government representatives can determine a political action framework on the basis of science-based recommendations so that sustainable innovations in the interest of climate protection can succeed on the market.” As an adviser to the German government, the Director of the PIK and member of the Leibniz Association introduced a carbon pricing scheme as a guiding measure for greater climate protection and, in this way, was able to make a significant contribution to the successful conclusion of the negotiations on the climate

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programme. "Ottmar Edenhofer decisively advanced carbon pricing as a guiding economic instrument in the field of German climate politics," says Bonde in conclusion.

Successful involvement in international climate negotiations

The economist was responsible for outstanding achievements from 2008 to 2015 in a managerial capacity as a member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and a co-author of various IPCC reports. "Here he once again saw himself as a facilitator between science and politics, and made decisive contributions for a necessary reform process," says the DBU General Secretary. Edenhofer has been Chief Economist at the PIK since 2005; since 2018 he has been the Director of the organisation together with Johan Rockström, who received the German Environmental Award in 2015. Furthermore, since 2012 Edenhofer has been the Founding Director of the MCC, which does research on economic policy decisions with respect to global common resources. He is a Professor of the Economics of Climate Change at the Technical University in Berlin. Moreover, he is also a member of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. And he is co-chair of the steering committee of the science platform for the Climate Protection Plan 2050, which was appointed by the Federal Ministry of Science and Research and the Federal Ministry of the Environment, and manages the Copernicus Project "Ariadne", which is one of the largest research initiatives into the energy transition in Germany. Bonde: "In his efforts to establish socially balanced climate policies, Mr Edenhofer has also successfully advocated for the rapid integration of a German carbon pricing reform in a European system as the basis for international climate negotiations." His interlocutors include many high-ranking figures from the world of politics, religion and society such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Pope Francis and climate activist Greta Thunberg.

Climate protection as a social justice issue

Bonde emphasizes: Edenhofer has always been fascinated by interdisciplinary approaches. Edenhofer, who calls Potsdam home, was originally influenced by social ethics and was even a Jesuit for a time. "For this reason, Professor Edenhofer has always asked himself how we can develop our economic system so that low-earning members of society can get by with their earnings," says Bonde. Born into a middle-class family of entrepreneurs in Lower Bavaria, Edenhofer has demonstrated, among other things, that the motivation needed to actively get involved in the fight against climate change is not diminished by economic incentives like a carbon tax, but rather strengthened. Bonde: "Economics and morality are not mutually exclusive for him." Furthermore, Edenhofer demonstrated "that the revenues generated by carbon pricing can be used to provide the poorest among us with access to clean water and electricity. He has turned climate protection into a social justice issue."

Down-to-earth and a man of the people

Despite international renown, Edenhofer has always remained down-to-earth and has maintained a talent for communicating his ideas and concepts in a plainspoken, understandable way, says Bonde. He has a great deal of respect for local politicians, who in turn respond extremely positively thanks to his ideas on land value tax. Edenhofer, in his own words: "The prosperity of the 21st century depends on proper management of global common resources – and this includes land."

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