We do not often face choices that are life-changing. Even less, choices that will change the lives of our children and our children’s children.

Today Europe faces many such choices. The future of the Euro. Europe’s place in the world. Global competition. Climate change. Energy Security. Competition for dwindling natural resources. Austerity versus growth. With such choices to make maybe wind energy seems less important? Wrong!

Energy is a battleground. Everyone is debating energy. Obama and Romney. Sarkozy and Hollande. In Germany, UK, Spain, China, Japan. What is the future of nuclear? Are renewables affordable? Is fracking a good or bad idea? Is CCS the answer? How to achieve energy security?

Above all: in an economic crisis, every penny counts - so which energy technologies should get our money? Is it wise for the EU to have one country as our main supplier of oil, gas and coal? Is it wise when that country is Russia? Is it wise to rely on Colombia for coal? On Algeria for gas?

We pay Russia, Colombia and Algeria for dirty fossil fuels when we can produce electricity at home with wind and other renewables. We pay for jobs in those countries instead of at home. In 2010 each person in the EU paid €706 to import fossils fuels.

What about subsidies? The International Energy Agency says that for every dollar of Government support given to renewables – not just wind – at least 6 are given to fossil fuels. The European Environment Agency says that 80% of EU energy subsidies go to fossil fuels and nuclear.

After 50 years nuclear power is more dependent on Government support than ever before. The UK has now set aside £54bn for decommissioning its nuclear power stations – enough to pay for wind turbines to produce 40% of UK’s power demand.

Onshore wind is already competitive with new gas and new coal – and considerably cheaper than new nuclear. The price of fossil fuels is highly unpredictable. You can see on-screen the average growth of natural gas selling prices compared to wind energy from EWEA’s new Green Growth report. The stable one is wind.
Electricity price increases are falsely blamed on renewables. In reality they were caused by gas price increases. You can see on-screen a breakdown of the 75% increase in annual energy bills in the UK from 2004 to 2010 - 6% caused by renewables.

Wind energy drives down the cost of electricity because it needs no fuel, so its marginal costs are very low. Today fuel price increases are passed onto the consumer at almost no risk to the power producer. Commissioner Oettinger – the wind industry strongly supports your efforts to create a single electricity market across the European Union. Such a market will allow our industry to drive down electricity prices across Europe.

And none of this takes into account the environmental and human health costs of extracting, transporting and burning fossil fuels.

Perhaps wind energy can’t deliver the energy we need. Wrong! Denmark produces 26% of its electricity from wind. Spain 16%. Portugal 16%. Germany 10%. Figures that were considered impossible even 10 years ago.

The European Commission says wind will supply 32% to 49% of EU power production by 2050 – more than any other technology. And supplying 49% will cost no more than supplying 32%.

We live in times of austerity. But everyone knows that Europe needs growth. And what can provide growth in Europe? Wind energy.

In 2009, the European Economic Recovery Plan invested in electricity and gas infrastructure, CCS and offshore wind. Offshore wind created or protected 4,000 jobs – 10 times more than CCS with about half the money.

Today EWEA is publishing a new report: ‘Green growth – the impact of wind energy on jobs and the economy’. It shows that from 2007 to 2010 wind energy’s contribution to Europe’s GDP rose 30% while Europe’s GDP fell. The wind industry created 33% more jobs while European unemployment jumped. In 2010, the industry made €32.4 bn for Europe and employed 238,000 people. It exported €8.8bn of products and services. And it can do a lot more. It can contribute €173bn to EU GDP by 2030 and employ almost 800,000 people.

Investing in wind energy is what Americans would call a ‘no brainer’. But if we take the decarbonisation path we must stick to it.

The industry must – and will – deliver cost reductions to remain competitive in the global economy. Our new report shows that the wind industry invests over 5% of its turnover in R&D – 3 times the EU average, well above the EU’s 3% target. Offshore wind has to, and will, reduce costs like onshore wind has.

National Governments and the EU must provide long-term certainty for energy investors. First by ensuring that changes in support mechanisms do not destabilise the market. By avoiding abrupt, and especially retroactive, changes.
Second, by setting an ambitious renewable energy target for 2030. Commissioner Oettinger - the wind industry strongly supports your timetable for a decision on 2030 targets by 2014.

Third, by delivering the necessary grid infrastructure and a functioning European market in electricity. Commissioner Oettinger, we strongly support your efforts to speed up permitting and increase funding for electricity grid infrastructure.

For as long as there is a healthy wind energy market in Europe, wind turbines will be manufactured in Europe. And with support from the European Union on R&D, European companies will remain technology leaders. It is 30 years since the European Wind Energy Association was set up. 30 years ago a small group of visionary engineers were saying that wind energy was viable. Now I can inform the President of the European Council and the European Commissioner for Energy that wind energy can help Europe in economic growth, reducing energy dependency, and decarbonising our power sector.

It’s not really a choice is it?