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EU Live Issues

Latvian EU Presidency

The Latvian Prime Minister, Laimdota Straujuma presented the priorities of the Latvian Presidency of the EU Council in the the Parliament on 14 January 2015. Latvia will focus on three priorities during its Presidency:

- Facilitation of EU competitiveness as a key to economic growth and jobs;
- Full exploitation of the digital potential of the European economy and,
- Reinforcing the role of the European Union in the world.



In addition, the Latvian Presidency shall also contribute to the implementation of the European Council's five-year Strategic Agenda, the Commission's 2015 Annual Work Programme and the unfinished business from the previous legislature. The Latvian Presidency will review the Europe 2020 Strategy, promote work in an industrial competitive Europe, support an Economic and Monetary Union and work on better regulations.

Out of the main lines, the programme of the Latvian Presidency also underlined the need to improve health and safety at work and to reduce the number of accidents in the workplace, emphasising the necessity of implementing the new EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2014-2020). Concerning the resource efficiency and green growth agenda, the Presidency will open debate on further integration of environment aspects in the European Semester and in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Presidency will also follow closely the initiatives to promote a circular economy, and efficient waste management, a better air quality throughout Europe and

provide input to the Biodiversity Strategy mid-term review.

Commission Work Programme 2015

Further to the release of the European Commission Work Programme, there has been some reactions and updates:

Circular Economy

The European Commission had announced the withdrawal of the package, with the justification that it would put forward a new and more ambitious proposal by the end of the year.

Many stakeholders, including NGOs and the EU Council, expressed concerns. Although several parliamentary groups attempted to overturn the decision by presenting resolutions ahead of a vote in the European Parliament on 16 January, none won the necessary majority to be adopted. Most MEPs were in agreement over the principles, but could not agree on the wording.

The European Commission has nevertheless reassured that it would propose more ambitious policy measures, and outlined some of the key elements:

- To take better into account the variety of situations across Member States;
- To focus on achievable objectives and on their effective implementation on the ground;
- To create a market for secondary raw material.

The Latvian EU Presidency, which started on 1 January 2015, confirms that this topic is part of its priorities and that EU Member States would work towards a common denominator in order to make circular economy a reality.

On 21 January, MEPs from the Environment Committee and from all political parties expressed their satisfaction to see the topic back on the agenda, but as well skepticism

over the need to improve the current proposal, and a frank consternation with regards the time lost over this urgent matter.

Air Quality

The issue is similar to that of the Circular Economy Package: the European Commission announced the modification of the proposal in order to improve it, which faced at the very least concerns if not opposition from many stakeholders.

Once again, the European Commission reassured that the proposal is not off the table, to the satisfaction of MEPs who are grateful for what they consider as a U-turn.

Green Week 2015 – Save the Date



The 2015 edition of the Green Week, organised by the European Commission (DG Environment), will take place this year on 3-5 June in Brussels. The theme will be “Nature and Biodiversity”, which reflects the fact that 2015 being the mid-term review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy. Some sessions and/or side events should be dedicated to Natura 2000, ecosystem services and other key topics for the Aggregates Industry. More information will be available in February and March.

UEPG News

RDS & EPD WG meeting

On 15 January, Members of the UEPG RDS (Regulated Dangerous Substances) and EPD (Environmental Product Declaration) Working Group met at the UEPG Office. The meeting was chaired by Brian Bone (MPA, UK). Main topics discussed were:

- The latest developments with regards to the new proposal of TS 3 (CEN TC351 WG1). UEPG Members will argue that the agreement should first be on sampling, then only on testing methods.
- The differences between Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) and EPDs.

Next steps

The next meeting will take place on 8 Sept. 2015, in the UEPG office.

UNPG meets in Brussels

Initiated by UEPG President Arnaud Colson, UNPG (French Aggregates Association) Board Members visited Brussels on 28 January with the objective to get a closer link to relevant EU topics and ways of supporting UEPG lobbying campaigns.



Two representatives from the Permanent Representation of France to the EU presented economic and environmental topics, including the Circular Economy Package and the Natura 2000 fitness check. Much debate took place about the actual and potential role that the French Aggregates Industry could play in the European decision-making process.



UNPG Board Members then entered the European Parliament and were welcomed by MEP Marc Tarabella (S&D, Belgium). Mr Tarabella highlighted the pro-active role of the Belgian Aggregates Federation FEDIEX and welcomed the involvement of the Aggregates Industry by constructively influencing the EU legislative procedure. The Delegation took the opportunity to visit the European Parliament in Brussels during the mini-plenary week.



Thierry de l’Escaille, Director of the European Landowners Organisation (ELO), joined for lunch in the exclusive Club des Guides in front of the European Parliament and presented his experience in representing interests, underlining that it is essential for trade associations to benefit from the expertise and availability of the sector they represent.

In the afternoon, Stefan Leiner, Head of Unit for Natura 2000 (DG Environment) presented briefly the Natura 2000 directives, and more specifically, the legislative fitness check. Now that the consultant had been subcontracted (Milieu), key stakeholders – such as UEPG – would be consulted. The fitness check would include the detailed assessment of several EU Member States including France, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Poland, UK, Spain, Slovakia and Malta. An online public consultation would be launched in April and a EU-Conference is planned to take place on 29 September in Brussels. The results of the fitness-check would be published in the first quarter of 2016.

Fruitful exchanges followed on the difficulties met by the Aggregates Industry not only in France, but also in many other European countries. Stefan Leiner advised to take an active role in the fitness-check, and to keep working with the competent authorities.



Carlo Pettinelli, Director for Sustainable Growth and EU 2020 (DG GROW), and Maria Escuer Ballabriga, Policy Officer for Raw Materials, presented the implementation of the Raw Materials Strategy and welcomed UEPG active involvement.

Upcoming UEPG events

- 3 February** Recycling Task Force
- 3 February** Committee Chair Coordination
- 4 February** Market Based Instruments WG
- 12-13 March** Committee meetings, Stockholm, Sweden
- 30 March** PR & Communication TF
- 15 April** Board Policy Dinner
- 16 April** Board meeting