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Dutch EU Presidency Priorities

On 1 January 2016, the Netherlands will take over the 6-months EU Council Presidency from Luxembourg. While the logo of the last Dutch EU Presidency of 2004 will be re-used, almost everything else will be different: the state of the Union, the size of the EU, the internal and external challenges and the Dutch Government itself has changed during the last 12 years, says Pieter de Gooijer, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the EU during his speech in the Bavarian Representation in Brussels. It's about managing expectations when the Netherlands are in the hot seat of an EU Presidency in times where Europe is needed most but not popular with many of its citizens.



The Dutch Presidency will focus on progressing with the recently published circular economy package organising a stakeholder conference on 25 January in Rotterdam. Emphasis will lie on better regulation and cutting red tape to get Europe off the back from citizens, including a reduction of the administrative burden for companies. The publication of a staff working document on the Natura 2000 Fitness Check will also be expected with high interest. Furthermore, the Dutch EU Presidency will organise a Conference in May on "the prevention of work related cancers".

2016 Commission Programme

The European Commission has published its Work Programme for 2016, entitled "No time for business as usual". There are no big surprises as the programme is in line with what had previously been announced for 2015. Among the 10 priorities, three are relevant for our industry:

A new boost for Jobs, Growth and Investment

Optimising the use of resources is essential to ensure that growth is green and inclusive. Starting in 2016, the European Commission intends to implement an Action Plan on the Circular Economy to create a single market for the re-use of materials and resources, supporting the move away from a linear economy. This will require action in all parts of the economic cycle, from sourcing to production, consumption, waste and recycling and innovation to harness economically and environmentally efficient business opportunities. The EU chemicals legislation (REACH) will also undergo a Fitness Check.

Further evaluation of EU law

Fitness Checks will also take place or continue on the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (E-PRTR) Regulation, the Birds and Habitats Directives (Natura 2000) and the evaluation of the Occupational Safety and Health Directives linked with a consultation of Social Partners, an EC internal Assessment and an EC working staff document. The Fitness Check on the Environmental Reporting might lead to a repeal of Council Directive of 23 December 1991 on standardising and rationalising reports on the implementation of certain Directives relating to the environment (91/692/EEC).

A Deeper and Fairer Internal Market

This should go along with a Strengthened Industrial Base and should include competitiveness.

Circular Economy Package published

On 2 December, the European Commission released its much expected new Circular Economy Package, following the withdrawal of the first package in July 2014. Much of what we had previously announced has been confirmed. The package comprises several documents, including:

Communication “Closing the loop - An EU action plan for the Circular Economy”

This is an action plan which addresses the different phases of the economic cycle:

Production

- Product design should allow for repairability and reusability, including through economic incentives;
- The production processes need to address the use of resources;
- The statement that “Primary raw materials, including renewable materials, will continue to play an important role in production processes, even in a circular economy. In this context, attention must be paid to the environmental and social impacts of their production” might be positive for the Aggregates Industry;
- The Communication also reminds that the BREFs, including the one currently being reviewed on mining waste, are important elements to promote best practices for waste management.

Consumption

- Labelling systems need to guide consumers in their choices. The European Commission is developing a specific tool (Product Environmental Footprint);
- Prices also guide consumers in their choices, and the European Commission encourages “Member States /.../ to provide incentives and use economic instruments, such as taxation, to ensure that product prices better reflect environmental costs”;
- Green Public Procurement should also play a key role by including criteria on recyclability.

Waste management

- The principle of the waste hierarchy is re-affirmed;
- Improvements are needed in waste collection and sorting.

From waste to resources: boosting the market for secondary raw materials and water reuse

- Quality of the secondary raw materials is an essential area to work on, as well as clarifying existing rules on 'end-of-waste'. Public procurement should here again play a role, with minimum levels of recycled products;
- To improve the availability of data on secondary raw materials, the Commission will further develop the recently initiated Raw Materials Information System and support EU-wide research on raw materials flows;
- The Commission will take a series of actions to facilitate water reuse; this will include a legislative proposal on minimum requirements for reused water;
- Some sectors have been identified as priority areas. Construction and Demolition is one of them. The development of voluntary protocols (as the one currently under development) should be helpful, but the assessment of the environmental performance of buildings will also be needed.

To monitor progress, the Resource Efficiency Scoreboard and the Raw Materials Scoreboard will be used amongst other indicators.

A proposal to amend the Waste Framework Directive

The proposal includes encouragements for Member States to use financial incentives (e.g. a tax on landfilling).

For most industrial and extractive waste, an industry-oriented approach using Best Available Techniques reference documents (BREFs) is considered as a suitable solution.

A specific paragraph will require a close follow-up from UEPG: “To further support effective implementation of the Raw Materials Initiative, Member States should also promote the reuse of products constituting the main sources of raw materials. They should also include in their waste management plans nationally appropriate measures regarding collection and recovery of waste containing significant amounts of these raw materials. The measures should be included in the

waste management plans when they are updated for the first time following the entry into effect of this Directive. The Commission will provide information about the relevant product groups and waste streams at EU level. This provision does not preclude the Member States to take measures for other raw materials considered as important to their national economy.”

Some definitions are also clarified: “backfilling means any recovery operation where suitable waste is used for reclamation purposes in excavated areas or for engineering purposes in landscaping or construction instead of other non-waste materials which would otherwise have been used for that purpose”.

Next steps

The European Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to adopt the Action Plan. UEPG will keep engaging with all relevant stakeholders, especially on items related to indicators, targets and resource taxation.

WWF Evening Dialogue on Nature

On 15 December, WWF organised an evening dialogue on Nature, hosted by the Luxembourg EU Presidency in collaboration with BirdLife Europe, the European Environment Bureau and Friends of the Earth. UEPG President Jesús Ortiz spoke in a high-level panel with Carole Dieschbourg, Luxembourgish Environment Minister; Cristiana Pașca Palmer, Romanian Minister for the Environment, Waters and Forests; Rastislav Rybanič, Director General for Nature Protection and Landscape of the Slovakian Environment Ministry; Daniel Calleja-Crespo, Director-General of DG Environment and Marco Lambertini, Director-General of WWF International.



Speakers from the Council and from WWF positioned themselves as against a revision of the Natura 2000 Directives, but acknowledging the need for better implementation. The Commission

representative identified four key issues to address: implementation, agriculture, funding and awareness of stakeholders.



UEPG President Jesús Ortiz focused his statement on the compatibility between aggregates extraction and biodiversity, demonstrated by the fact that several Natura 2000 sites are former aggregates extraction sites. Cooperation with local stakeholders, in particular NGOs, was essential. He presented ideas for improvement, including law enforcement and a proportionate application of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

The debate concluded with the wish for a better integration between socio, economic and environmental matters, extending that to be applied for all legislation.

Three scenarios for RCS

UEPG, together with other signatory partners of the Social Dialogue Agreement on respirable crystalline silica (NEPSI), are currently discussing three potential scenarios for respirable crystalline silica (RCS) and the future policy in this area.

UEPG Members will receive an email with detailed information and are urged to discuss the scenarios provided and to send the UEPG General Secretariat their opinion and advice by Friday 15 January. In this context, NEPSI Reporting becomes ever more important and RCS is classified as one of the highest priorities for UEPG.

New Structure of DG Employment

In line with Commission President Juncker's announcement to give further importance and visibility to Social Dialogue, the European Commission has modified its structure and Directorates within DG EMPL (Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion). Social Dialogue is now under Directorate A on 'Employment and Social Governance'. Directorate E dedicated to 'skills' making the link with Jobs

and Growth, which was prior within DG EAC (Education and Culture), is now part of DG Employment.

EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020

The aim of the Strategic Framework is to better protect the more than 217 million workers in the EU from work-related accidents and diseases. This should be achieved through improving implementation of existing health and safety rules, in particular by enhancing the capacity of SMEs; to put in place effective and efficient risk prevention strategies; to improve the prevention of work-related diseases by tackling new and emerging risks without neglecting existing risks; to take account of the ageing of the EU's workforce.

In March and October 2015, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) issued conclusions on the Strategic Framework. In the same line, the European Parliament approved an own-initiative Report presented by [Ole Christensen MEP](#) (S&D, Denmark).

The EPSCO conclusions and Parliamentary Report underlined the positive implication of the Framework by supporting SMEs with law compliance; strengthening the role of social partners; developing more consistent data-recording and non-legislative approaches (e.g. studies and guidelines) to support EU policies. UEPG will monitor the review of the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive at work with the introduction of new substances and their binding limit values. The update of existing Directives related to musculoskeletal disorders (vibration, manual handling of loads and display screen equipment) is equally of interest.

The Parliamentary Report included a proposal for a legal instrument on musculoskeletal disorders and to draw the attention on respirable dust causing cancer (e.g. nasal cavity tumor) from processing of materials. The Report also calls for providing common health indicators and definitions of work-related diseases, including stress at work.

1st AdCo Meeting on Explosives

The Administrative Cooperation Group (AdCo), composed of market surveillance

authorities of EU Member States and the European Commission, met for the first time on 2 December in Rome, Italy, gathering 19 EU Member States and 1 EFTA country. Martyn Sime (UK) was elected as Chair of the AdCo Group for a 2 year mandate. The representative of the AdCo group to attend meetings of the Forum of Notified Bodies will be determined by 15 January 2016. UEPG, leading the Explosives for civil uses Task Force, and the Federation of European Explosives Manufacturers (FEEM) were invited as observers to present the work and experiences made on the 'Trace & Track' Directive. The European Commission and Members States welcomed the achievements of the Task Force presented by Miette Dechelle, UEPG Public Affairs Manager.

Manufacturers and Distributors were asked to provide sufficient information when repackaging explosives. The associated label on parent packages or sub-packages should contain sufficient information to generate the associated list of unique identification codes of each article in the package. Technical challenges demonstrate the importance to use the FEEM voluntary guidance on code and XML files.

The AdCo did not take any final decision at the meeting on how to proceed. Members State representatives will exchange in written to take a final position in 2016.

Maritime Spatial Planning

According to the new Framework Directive of July 2014, Member States shall take into consideration – when setting up maritime spatial plans – relevant interactions of activities and uses such as installations and infrastructures for the exploration, exploitation and extraction of minerals and aggregates.



During the opening address, Environment and Maritime Affairs Commissioner Karmenu Vella

stressed that economic and environment should go hand in hand. To ensure EU Member States are on track implementing this Framework Directive, DG Maritime Affairs organised this event with about 150 stakeholders attending.

Investments in Infrastructure

The European Commission undertook a major conference with 350 participants on the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) on Raw Materials and Horizon 2020 Brokerage Event. The objective of this event was to explain the opportunities for business, outlining the investment opportunities of the Juncker-Plan, to review achievements of and the way forward for the EIP.



The Juncker-Plan, designed to mobilise €315 billion in three years and to create an investment friendly environment, includes now an approved list of projects per EU Member State. Any EU based entity can send further project proposals to the [European Investment Project Portal \(EIPP\)](#) which should be available online by the end of 2015.

Environmental Product Declarations

On 10 December, Construction Products Europe (CPE) organised a workshop on Environmental Products Declarations (EPD) which Sandrine Devos, UEPG Public Affairs Manager, attended.

After presentations, clarifying some key concepts on Life Cycle Assessments and the development of new environmental indicators in EPDs, the audience debated on the convergence between EPDs and the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF). EPDs are developed by CEN TC 350 for construction products at building level while the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) is developed by the Joint Research Centre for the European Commission.

This is a topical issue as the new Circular Economy Package emphasises on the need to assess and label environmental footprints, especially for the construction sector. What is at stake is to have a single system of assessment, which does not create unnecessary costs for the industry, and allows for benchmarking at building level for architects. It is also important to ensure that recycling is done when it makes sense from an environmental and economic perspective.

UEPG News

MIRO builds up biodiversity database

At the last Environment and Economic Expert Working Group of the German Aggregates Federation (MIRO) on 1 December in Berlin, it was decided to launch a database collecting information on environment and biodiversity produced by companies during environmental impact assessments and studies related to the permitting procedure.

The idea behind this database is to share information with other German aggregates producing companies and to have a sound basis to proof the achievements of the Aggregates Industry for environmental management.

Charte Environnement on Recycling

On 2 December, Sandrine Devos, UEPG Public Manager, attended a regional Seminar organised by UNPG (the French Aggregates Association) on recycling. The points of view of the concrete and aggregates producers were presented, with the ambitious recycling targets being discussed against the current achievements. Technical, economic and environmental aspects were addressed. A promising Research & Development project (Recybéton) was presented. It was finally an opportunity for some sites to receive their certification from the French Environment Charter, acknowledging their sustainable management.

PR and Communications Task Force

Conference calls of one hour and one physical meeting per year ensures that Members of the UEPG PR and Communications Task Force can exchange

more frequently and to reply in a timely and efficient manner to UEPG PR and Communications objectives.

The last conference call took place on 18 December, at which the main upcoming topics for 2016 were discussed such as the promotion of NEPSI 2016 Reporting, the NEEIP Forum 2016, UEPG Biodiversity and Recycling Brochures, and UEPG added value and services to its Members. The Task Force will also assist in drafting a Brochure on Water, on the circular economy and on prevention of dust, and will support the UEPG General Secretariat in preparing the 2016 Sustainable Development Awards Ceremony.

Questionnaires on the PR and Communications' work of Members as well as the one of the UEPG General Secretariat were sent to UEPG Members. The results will support the 2016 UEPG PR and Communications Strategy.

Season's Greetings

The UEPG Team, namely UEPG President, Jesús Ortiz, Secretary General, Dirk Fincke and Public Affairs Managers Sandrine Devos and Miette Dechelle, would like to wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a healthy, safe and prosperous New Year 2016! We would like to warmly thank all our Members for their much-valued support for UEPG activities in 2015.

Upcoming UEPG events

- 28 January** Marine Aggregates Task Force meeting, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 3 February** Recycling Task Force meeting, Brussels
- 17 February** PR & Communications TF meeting, Brussels
- 17 February** UEPG Committee Chair Coordination meeting, Brussels
- 19 February** RDS & EPD WG meeting, Brussels
- 10-11 March** Committees Meetings, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 20 April** NEEIP Forum, Brussels
- 20 April** Board Policy Dinner, Brussels
- 21 April** Board Meeting, Brussels
- 2-3 June** Delegates Assembly, Berlin, Germany