

EU Sustainability Policy Developments

The European Policy Agenda on Sustainability A public affairs & Communications Perspective Werner P. Bohrer, Managing Director – EU.select, Belgium



Mr. Bohrer presented an overview entitled "The European Policy Agenda on Sustainability." He began by recalling the most cited definition of Sustainable Development, describing it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (UN Brundtland Commission 1987).

Mr Bohrer reminded the audience of the "three main pillars" of sustainability - Environmental, Social, and Economic - and of the importance of finding a balance between these "three pillars". Since 1997, sustainable development has become a fundamental objective of the EU. In 2001, the EC launched the SDS (Sustainable Development Strategy), and a first progress report was made in 2007. Nowadays the EU concentrates on changing attitudes by promoting a society that is focused on sustainability.

He briefly mentioned the priorities for the coming period up to 2010, presenting the main "building blocks":

- ▶ Thematic Strategy on Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
- ▶ Thematic Strategy on Waste Prevention and Recycling
- ▶ Integrated Product Policy (IPP)

He also quoted Maurice Strong, one of the world's leading environmentalists "Sustainability means running the global environment - Earth Inc. - like a corporation: with depreciation, amortization and maintenance accounts" ...

- ▶ Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)
- ▶ Eco-label Scheme
- ▶ Eco-design of Energy Using Product Directive (EuP)
- ▶ Environmental Technology Action Plan (ETAP)
- ▶ Green Public Procurement (GPP)

The rest of Mr. Bohrer's presentation focused on **Sustainable Consumption & Production (SCP)**. Mr Bohrer told delegates that the new Action Plan on SCP will consist of a vision and revitalising of existing legislation, for instance on EMAS, GPP and eco-labeling. He also told them that, unfortunately, the Action Plan has been delayed repeatedly by the European Commission.

The objective would be to create a virtuous circle in order to improve the overall environmental performance of products, leading to the

demand for better products (but also technologies and processes) and finally helping the consumer in his purchasing decision.

The priorities are:

- ▶ Reduction of climate change emissions
 - ▶ Improvements in the efficiency of the use of natural resources and energy
 - ▶ Phasing out of the use of hazardous and endangered materials
- Therefore, the Commission will:

- ▶ Provide one set of legislation and conditions for the industry;
- ▶ Make the future predictable: what will come tomorrow must be clear today;
- ▶ Support the right choices for innovation and investments.

Amongst the core elements are:

- ▶ The Eco-Design Directive which currently covers energy-using products (EuPs) and which might also include non energy-using items;
- ▶ Life-cycle assessment (in order to check the eco performance of a product);
- ▶ 'Best performing' products should be encouraged through preferential public procurement rules (after benchmarking carried out on common basis rules). It is acknowledged that the difficulty will be to avoid internal market distortions and therefore, a harmonisation of criteria for 'green' public procurement would be required.

The sustainability challenge according to the Draft Action Plan

"Sustainable development [...] aims at the continuous improvement of the quality of life and well-being on Earth for present and future generations, in a way that mutually reinforces economic growth, welfare and environmental protection. Increasingly rapid global changes, from the melting of the icecaps to growing energy and resource demand, are challenging this objective"



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SCA harnesses windpower

Finally Mr Borer's presentation dealt with the response of the industry to this paradigm shift, bearing in mind that what the industry needs is sustainable regulation. He emphasised that the most important thing is to manage and be involved at the beginning of the process, and to participate in the development and shaping of the regulation. This requires the use of all kinds of instruments: media relations, thematic dialogue, monitoring, coalition building etc...but what counts is that the industry must become a privileged partner in the process in order to gain maximum influence and facilitate better regulation! Answering one of the most repeated questions during the Congress - 'How can we change the perceptions of society when we are promoting corrugated?' Mr Bohrer maintained that the answer was simple - start by improving your communication skills.