

PRESS RELEASE**Energy efficiency and renewables:
SMEs have their say**

The complex relationship between energy and the EU's 23 million SMEs was debated today at a EUROCHAMBRES' conference, organised in the framework of 'EU Sustainable Energy Week', in the presence of Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs. The event focused on two crucial chapters of the energy dossier: energy efficiency, and renewable energies.

Energy Efficiency – “Not only for your conscience, but also for your wallet”

Increasing energy efficiency – not only in the business sector, but in the whole society – is vital, otherwise reaching a share of 20% energy from renewables will be even more difficult. What's more, energy efficiency has the merit of combining benefits for the environment with cost savings.

“Caring for the environment is not only good for your conscience but also for your wallet,” says Eric Muys, CEO of VINK NV, a plastics wholesaler and transformer who has saved both kilowatts and money through optimising the lighting, compressed air and heating/cooling systems in his facilities in Belgium.

Tony Guy, Operations Director of UK company Modec, added: *“We combine energy efficiency with renewables – taking measures to reduce energy consumption in our production processes, and having chosen a green electricity supplier. We also recommend to our customers to fuel the zero-emissions vehicles we produce with green electricity.”*

“These two examples show that you do not always need regulations to persuade SMEs to be environmentally friendly! It's often better to just enable them to tackle the problem their own way,” said Pierre Simon, EUROCHAMBRES' President.

Member States should therefore privilege measures like awareness raising, training and provision of external expertise for SMEs in their national energy efficiency action plans. The Commission should then focus particularly on them in its further evaluations of those plans.

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EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 19 million enterprises in Europe through 46 members and a European network of 2000 regional and local Chambers.

Renewables – ‘Enhancing leadership while maintaining today’s competitiveness’

"The new European directive will dramatically boost employment of local SMEs in the renewable energy sector. Energy will be created by Europeans for Europe and not imported from unstable regions elsewhere in the world. This will enhance European leadership in all renewable energy technologies and will therefore lead to a long term competitive edge for Europe," said Gerhard Rabensteiner, Managing Director of KIOTO Clear Energy AG in Austria and President of the European Solar Thermal Industries Federation.

Yet, the challenge for decision makers at EU level in shaping the new legislation on renewables and climate change – and also for the implementation in Member States – is to have an eye for the future, but also an eye for the present level of competitiveness which should not be hampered by factors such as excessive energy prices.

"Environmental issues are important to sustain tomorrow's life. But while caring for the next generations, we should not forget today's people and problems. Even though energy intensive processes have a reduced fee in Germany, each job in our aluminium production is currently burdened with additional costs of 20,000 EUR per year, not yet counting the expenses caused by the Emissions Trading System," explained Martin Iffert, Managing Director at TRIMET ALUMINIUM AG.

EUROCHAMBRES has always urged that the reduction of any remaining administrative burdens to the development of renewables should be treated as a priority, because faster and smoother (and thus more economical) project development benefits all parties concerned. EUROCHAMBRES welcomes the fact that this is reflected in the draft directive, as well as the inclusion of sustainability criteria for biofuels.

"We still have a number of concerns," added Mr Simon, *"such as e.g. effective ways to ensure Europe's renewables potential is used in the most cost efficient manner and how to maintain European industries' competitiveness in face of competition from countries which make no or lower climate protection efforts. This conference illustrates our determination to contribute to the debate."*

Materials from the conference as well as a collection of Chambers' best practices and policy recommendations in Energy Efficiency and Renewables can be downloaded from www.eurochambres.eu/content/default.asp?PageID=1&DocID=660

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