



European Furniture Industries Confederation

High level conference on
**CIRCULAR ECONOMY
AND THE FURNITURE SECTOR**

27 JUNE 2017

Rue Montoyer, 24 - Bruxelles

CONFERENCE REPORT

The High Level Conference on “Circular Economy and the Furniture Sector”.

27 June 2017

EFIC – the European Furniture Industries Confederation

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 EFIC – European Furniture Industries Confederation

Conference Report

The High Level Conference on “Circular Economy and the Furniture Sector”.

On 27 June EFIC – the European Furniture Industries Confederation – organised the conference with the scope to draw the attention to specific challenges and opportunities seen by the European furniture industries in the implementation of the Circular Economy¹.

The Conference saw a big public participation and EFIC is glad to have celebrated its 10th Anniversary with a large audience of furniture manufacturers, industries’ representatives, NGOs, European Institutions’ representatives and other experts in environmental issues. The event gave them the opportunity to discuss and share views, experiences and best practices on Circular Economy and the Furniture Sector in what has been recognised as a very successful event.

The event also showed the strength and close cooperation between EU institutions and stakeholders active in Brussels.

Especially when it comes to strategic policy areas, this event gave a fundamental chance to directly engage with policy makers and EFIC has successfully reach its main goal.

We believe that a real circular economy should be achieved by engaging the main actors of a possible change: industries. The EU is already making a great effort but we think that additional steps must be made and today is a great occasion to directly discuss with policy maker how to lay a leading role in driving a circular change.

Markus Wiesner, EFIC President

1. Opening session: Circular Economy & Furniture Industry

The opening session focused on showcasing key actions already achieved and challenges seen by the main actors of the circular economy.

¹ The detailed conference programme is available at the following link <http://bit.ly/2s9QzSk>. It includes title of speakers’ presentation as well as their biographies and professional background.

The European Commission was represented by both DG Environment and DG



Growth officials, who are jointly in charge of the Circular Economy Strategy development in Europe. **Ms. Karolina D’Cunha**² presented the state of implementation and the way forward giving a clear overview on the key areas of action and the priority sectors.

She focused on the efficient use of wood and bio-based products as well as on the EU Ecolabel and the Green Public Procurement (GPP), which are seen as efficient booster to the circular economy implementation.

Mr. Mattia Pellegrini³ highlighted some European Commission initiatives with regard to the furniture sector such as the Commission staff working document on “a Blueprint for the EU Forest-based Industries”⁴. During his presentation, Mr. Pellegrini quoted the 307 pages study on “the EU furniture market situation and a possible products initiative”⁵, published in November



“Aging workforce, limited access to financial resources, national requirements and products’ certifications are some of the major challenges faced by the furniture industry today.”

Mattia Pellegrini

2014 and resulted in a thorough analysis of the furniture sector. Quoting the study on the “Optimised Cascading Use of Wood”⁶, he emphasized that cascading is essential and that the European Commission is currently working on this area. In conclusion, Mr. Pellegrini invited furniture companies to make a greater use of

financial instruments like the H2020 and Juncker funds, which can support furniture companies in developing needed changes to circularity.

² Deputy Head of Unit “Sustainable Production, Products & Consumption” – Directorate General for Environment.

³ Head of Unit for “Resource Efficiency and Raw Materials” – Directorate General for Growth.

⁴ A Blueprint for the EU forest-based industries: <http://bit.ly/2tHtnhC>

⁵ The EU furniture market situation and a possible products initiative: <http://bit.ly/2sL9dia>

⁶ Study on the Optimised Cascading Use of Wood: <http://bit.ly/2uoSVxm>

During the conference the **European Environmental Bureau (EEB)** presented some results of an ongoing study⁷ on circular economy in the furniture sector, which will be published in the upcoming weeks. **Mr. Carsten Wachholz** argued that appropriate policy levers can counter current constraints with increased repair, remanufacture and recycling, allowing gross value added for business, reduced impacts to the environment and job creation in Europe.

There are market failures to be addressed both on the supply and the demand side. Our study identified key interventions and explored potential policy options that would help the EU furniture market move towards greater circularity.

Carsten Wachholz

EFIC President, **Mr. Markus Wiesner**, clearly stated how furniture producers are committed to implement circular economy principles, but at the same time listed a number of preconditions needed in order to move from theory to practice.

Companies and furniture producers need incentives in a step-by-step transition to circularity, supported by an industry-led implementation of Eco-design. We advocate for a common European EPR schemes and for a smarter chemical policy in Europe.

Markus Wiesner

2. Panel Discussion I – Which obstacles to Circular Economy in the furniture sector?

The first panel discussion brought together expert speakers from industry and NGOs. They mainly focused on the obstacles faced by furniture producers, companies and public authorities in general when “thinking circular”. For example, **Mr. Robin Ljungar**⁸ stressed on the great potential of the European furniture industry in products **remanufacturing**. In this



The Audience - Photo by Jon Thys/TT

⁷ The Study is expected to be published in July 2017 in EEB website.

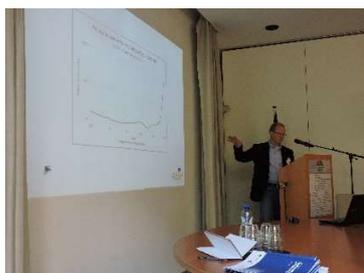
⁸ Sustainability Manager at TMF - Swedish Federation of Wood and Furniture Industry.

process, he highlighted the huge challenges due to the traditional way of producing in a linear economy as well as the use of chemicals, which limits the possibility to

We need to implement new and circular business models and the question we need to address to is: How can we change, repair or modify pieces of furniture?

Robin Ljungar

reuse pieces of furniture or other components. Yet, this is not sustainable anymore.



Mr. Robin Ljungar



Mr. Egil Sundet



Mr. Joan Marc Simon

The conference continued with **Mr. Egil Sundet**⁹ presenting “The Case for Flame Retardants Free Furniture”¹⁰. Potentially hazardous flame retardant chemicals are used in furniture for complying with standards set up for improving fire safety. However, they endanger human health, the environment, as well as competitiveness and product quality, and they actually increase fire toxicity. Mr. Sundet also outlined that there are increasing evidences showing that an EU action in favour of “Flame Retardants Free Furniture” is necessary to ensure protection of human health and the environment, without reducing fire safety.

There is an urgent need to re-evaluate the use of flame retardants in furniture and to take into account the possible adverse impacts on human health, workplaces, the environment and on the responsible management of furniture waste in the presence of other measures to reduce fires.

Egil Sundet

⁹ Director of Norsk Industri - The Association of Norwegian Furniture and Interior Industry

¹⁰ The campaign is supported by an Alliance of stakeholders ranging from environmental and health NGOs to industry, cancer organisations, fire fighters and trade unions. The Alliance shares and stresses the same concerns about the implications from the presence of harmful flame retardants chemicals in furniture products, and believes that more effective and less harmful ways to achieve fire safety exist and need to be evaluated. Contact info: alliance@safefurniture.eu



Mr. Joan Marc Simon¹¹ focused on some aspects of waste management, which is a core matter for the Circular Economy Strategy. In particular, he said that a system to manage furniture for their reuse is

currently missing and stressed on the need to re-inject furniture into the market

based on toxic-free products and traceability. This is

The goals of circular economy can only be reached by a thorough rethinking of business models.

Joan Marc Simon

crucial for the furniture sector because transforming waste into new resources is both a sustainable and innovative business solution.

3. Panel Discussion 2 – How to produce circular furniture?

The second panel discussion was opened by **Mr. Paolo Fantoni**¹².

He warned the audience about an upcoming shortage of raw material, in particular for wood, which will very likely occur by 2025. In view of this challenge, the wood-working sector shall apply new measures which combine both sustainability and



competitiveness. Mr. Fantoni also stressed that industries, businesses and consumers play a key role in steering this process and public authorities – including European Institutions – shall provide legislative tools and strong support.

For our companies, the circular economy is already a reality but we need to do more and the panel industry is already investing in new manufacturing technologies. On the other hand, a transition to circularity is not realistic without a joint effort of consumers, local and National authorities and the European Community as a whole.

Paolo Fantoni

¹¹ Director of Zero Waste Europe in Brussels.

¹² President of European Panel Federation and Managing Director of Fantoni Group.

The panel discussion continued with representatives of furniture companies operating in different European countries. **OFFECCT with Ms. Maria Ragnarsson¹³, Kvist with Mr. Michael Eirup¹⁴ and Kubedesign with Mr. Nazzareno Mengoni¹⁵** presented their *good practices* and showed their way to produce circular furniture from different perspectives.



Maria Ragnarsson Photo by Jon Thys/TT



Michael Eirup



Nazzareno Mengoni

OFFECCT philosophy is based on a lifecycle that includes concepts like reusing, recycling, original designs and authenticity. They are involved in different projects “that make a difference”, investing and striving for a real circular change, including the idea of a “circular flow of components”.

Kvist put the implementation of circular economy principles at the core of its business model. However, companies see many challenges including labelling.

Many different labels confuses both companies and consumer. We need one label or mutual recognition.
Michael Eirup

Kubedesign produces eco-friendly furniture made of cardboard and aims to become the “forerunner in environmentally aware design”. Mr. Mengoni showed how it is possible to produce fully recyclable furniture, made out of renewable sources and easy to customize. The challenge is to find a sustainable balance between implementing circular solution and satisfying consumers’ needs.

¹³ Quality and Environment Manager at OFFECCT - Swedish Furniture Producer Company

¹⁴ Quality Control & Training Manager at Kvist Industries A/S Danish Furniture Producer Company.

¹⁵ CEO Kubedesign - Italian Furniture Producer Company.

4. Closing session

The floor was therefore given to **Mr. Ado Lõhmus**¹⁶ who gave a general overview on the Estonian Presidency priorities and thus showing next initiatives and its programme.

The first priority will be fostering an open and innovative economy, which means ensuring an attractive business environment to better support growth and competitiveness. Environmental sustainability is now fundamental and the Estonian



Presidency will be very much focused in reaching ambitious targets and in applying a comprehensive approach that will take stakeholders' suggestions into consideration.

The transition to a Low Carbon Circular Economy is not simply an environmental policy agenda. It is a horizontal strategy involving all sectors of the economy designed to support new and sustainable business models.

Ado Lõhmus

Mr. Lõhmus announced some upcoming initiatives. For example, Ministers will discuss circular economy and eco-innovation at the Informal Environmental Council on 13-14 July in Tallin. It will be an occasion to identify the challenges faced by companies when entering the market with new and sustainable products. Moreover, the Presidency has

dubbed October 2017 as the “Innovation Month” in order to feature Eco-innovation prominently during the Council’s October meeting in Luxembourg¹⁷.

He also pointed out that Estonia will hold the Presidency for 6 months only. However, the preparation to the Presidency has already brought some concrete ideas from which they will start the discussion between governments. For example, with

¹⁶ Deputy Secretary General – Estonian Ministry of the Environment

¹⁷ The Presidency has organized an international conference on “Nature-based Solutions: from Innovation to Common-use“. 24-26 October 2017 in Tallin.

regard to labelling, the EU ecolabel should bring less bureaucratic obstacles and the Presidency will support the idea of having a product passport. It could give some

Eco-innovation means Re-designing our activities and production in a resource efficient and innovative way that also reduces impacts on the environment.

Ado Lõhmus

basic ecological footprint parameters for every product and both consumers and

companies could benefit from it. The Estonian Presidency aims at developing guidelines on many aspects related to circular economy, including eco-innovation, chemical policy, circular procurements, and “sustainable financing”, awarding ideas and business models which have an extra value for the society.

In conclusion, Mr. Markus Wiesner thanked the audience and all the speakers for the interesting contributions to the discussion. During his closing remarks, he stressed that the conference has sent many different messages to policy makers who will certainly take into account a stakeholders’ shared vision on circular economy. He also reiterates the strong commitment of the furniture industry in increasingly collaborate with policy makers on this fundamental policy area. It is of utmost importance to set a smart and realistic order of priorities. However, this has to be done together with all the actors involved.



EFIC Secretariat with EFIC President



EFIC Board Members – June 2017

We are paving the way to a circular change because a sustainable development is necessary. The Circular Economy Strategy is an opportunity and the conference gave a clearer picture of the way forward.

Annex 1

Presentations made available by the conference speakers:

Ms. Karolina D’Cunha European Commission – DG Environment

- <http://bit.ly/2ui5gXl>

Mr. Markus Wiesner EFIC - the European Furniture Industries Confederation

- <http://bit.ly/2tdMknS>

Mr. Carsten Wachholz European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

- <http://bit.ly/2teavIM>

Mr. Mattia Pellegrini European Commission – DG Growth

- <http://bit.ly/2t3B9me>

Mr. Robin Ljungar TMF – Swedish Federation of Wood and Furniture Industry

- <http://bit.ly/2t11e9g>

Mr. Egil Sundet EFIC Board Member – Norsk Industri

- <http://bit.ly/2tecqqG>

Mr. Paolo Fantoni European Panel Federation (EPF)

- <http://bit.ly/2sPREhA>

Mr. Michael Eirup Kvist – Danish Furniture Producer Company

- <http://bit.ly/2uhVO6p>

Mr. Nazzareno Mengoni KubeDesign – Italian Furniture Producer Company

- <http://bit.ly/2udUb91>

Please contact EFIC Secretariat for more information regarding the following presentations:

Ms. Maria Ragnarsson Offecct – Swedish Furniture Producer Company

Mr. Ado Lõhmus Estonian Presidency

About EFIC

EFIC – the European Furniture Industries Confederation - is the voice of the jointly united European Furniture Industries.

EFIC was founded in 2006 by seven national federations representing the furniture industries in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Slovakia, Spain and Turkey and it was later joined by Portugal, Sweden, Austria, Russia and Norway. Furthermore, Hungary, the Netherlands and France joined EFIC in 2015.

EFIC now represents more than the 70% of the total turnover of the furniture industries in Europe.

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