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**J**ean-Marie Vaissaire became president of construction products Europe the same day the association changed from its former identity, CEPMC. Most of his experience has been in gypsum and insulation businesses across western European countries, starting out in a British group, BPB plc., and then Saint-Gobain. In 2012 he became director general of Saint-Gobain Glassolutions and has also been president of AIMCC (French construction product association) since 2009, therefore bringing knowledge from both industry and the experience of heading another association.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE CHANGES WE WILL SEE IN THE ASSOCIATION FROM THE CHANGEOVER TO CONSTRUCTION PRODUCTS EUROPE?

The association is on a new path, thanks to the previous President, and we now want to target four main areas of action. Firstly, a re-launch of the industry- this would be created by significantly increasing the renovation rates of buildings and also by the delivery of new efficient homes where they are needed. We must also focus on developing both the industry's competitiveness and sustainability through the delivery of efficient construction solutions. Finally, we aim to support the EU institutions in creating a reliable EU policy framework that supports the long-term investment needs of our industry.

In addition to this new strategy, we have redeveloped the visual identity of the association to support the new work we are undertaking more effectively.

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR THE EU TO FOCUS ON THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR?

There are a multitude of long-term motivating factors for the EU to focus on the construction sector. First of all, the sector generates almost 10% of GDP and provides 20 million jobs in Europe. This is a huge chunk of the economy that is struggling and needs support. Secondly, we already have solutions for higher energy efficiency in new and existing buildings that are

key for the transformation of the EU's energy system. Actions from the industry are essential to reach the 2050 greenhouse gas emission targets by the EU. Overall, there is a strong commitment to innovation in daily business practice and a willingness to participate in EU research programmes and industry platforms- what we therefore need to see now is investment from the EU to capitalise on what is occurring within the construction sector.



### WHICH EUROPEAN INITIATIVES DO YOU THINK ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT AND RELEVANT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION PRODUCT SECTOR RIGHT NOW AND WHY?

The construction sector has been going through hard times for years now, which has led to an ever greater need of support from the European institutions. In July 2012, DG Enterprise presented the basis of a strategy aiming to re-launch the competitiveness in the construction industry for 2020. This strategy has created high expectations in our industry. Another big topic for our sector is the question of how to assess the sustainability of a building. Our industry is increasingly dedicating itself to the development of sustainability in construction, but the question of what a sustainable building is continues to trigger discussions. It is very important to take into consideration the whole life cycle of the building to determine what is 'efficient' and what is not, so that parts of a building don't become counterproductive to the building as a whole. This is more complicated than one would think.

## **WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE INDUSTRY? WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOUR INDUSTRY IS FACING?**

Our vision for the construction industry is to be more united, and work more strategically with all parts of the construction process (from architects to contractors and ultimately owners) so that we can develop a proactive strategy together. This strategy needs to create economic value, enhance resource efficiency, and contribute to social well-being. The challenge is finding a balance between all these requirements, while maintaining and even reviving the economic health of our industry. Taking all this into account, there is no denying that this is a challenging period for the construction sector.

## **WHAT ARE YOU EXPECTING FROM THE EU INSTITUTIONS?**

At our last workshop in June, our message for the industry was clear- An EU policy framework that is coherent, reliable, predictable, stimulating. This means that we must ensure coherence and integration between all European construction policies to foster growth and promote efficiency. This should create a reliable framework that will guarantee a fair and open market for all competing players. It is important that policies are also predictable- as a cyclical industry, the construction industry requires long-term investment and therefore long-term strategy and regulatory predictability. Lastly, by making sure that the industrial landscape is as stimulating as possible, European players would be in a better position when facing competition from outside the region.

Bearing this in mind, what we would like to see more specifically from the EU institutions is investment, ergo, regulatory incentives to drive growth. We also need to see innovative solutions to aid the construction industry. For example, not all solutions are found at European level- there are many good examples of solutions at local, regional and national levels and these need to be coordinated to have a more positive influence on the rest of Europe.

## **WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE INDUSTRY AT PRESENT?**

We are all aware that the European conditions for the construction market are very fragile at the moment- there will be slow progress in the industry. The European Construction Product Index remained low for the first half of 2013 with some national markets showing signs of recovery and overall we may have to accept that construction activity is likely to be weaker during 2013 than in 2012. Nevertheless, we should take a little comfort from the fact that there is a slight improvement in economic sentiment in Europe. This news should force us as an industry to work together and find solutions, of which there are many. We should take heed from countries where construction is still strong and work together using our networks in Brussels as a focal point.

## **WHAT DO YOU HOPE FOR IN YOUR TWO YEAR MANDATE OF THE ASSOCIATION?**

Overall, I want to see Construction Products Europe at the heart of the construction sector. The re-launch of the association started 13 months ago and we have already come a long way in regards to reorganisation. We now want to build on our structure and actively communicate on policy framework. We are currently developing a communication with key recommendations in terms of re-launch, competitiveness, sustainability and policy coherence for the construction industry and I would like to see this help deliver jobs and growth in our sector.

The association will continue its role of facilitator between the industry & European institutions on a wider and wider range of subjects. I hope to see us working successfully with all invested parties to achieve the most for the construction sector. To learn more, please follow our activities closely via our website, newsletter and social media.