

SUR LE TERRAIN

Communicating Climate Change

EU “top of the class”, but more to be done



Last Thursday and Friday DG COMM hosted a specific training seminar in Brussels for its Europe Direct information centres. The Europe Direct network, composed of 500 information centres in all Member States provides general information to citizens and promotes debates about EU issues at local level.

The programme – “Communicating Climate Change: on the road to Copenhagen” – attracted over 120 Europe Direct delegates who were addressed by a range of experts in the climate and energy fields, with representatives from the World Trade Organisation, World Wildlife Fund, European Environmental Agency, European Policy Centre. Also in attendance were communication experts and colleagues from DGs ENV, TREN, TRADE, DEV and COMM.

Much of the discussions on policy centred on the EU’s 20/20/20 package on climate change, in which Member States have agreed to meet a 20% cut in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020, compared with 1990 levels; increase the share of renewables in final energy consumption to 20% in 2020; and cut energy consumption by 20%. While only the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases and the renewable energy commitment are binding, the fact remains that the EU package is more ambitious than that of any other nation outside the EU. “When it comes to these commitments, we are the global leaders . . . top of the class”, declared Prof. Samuele Furfari of DG TREN.



A moment's concentration during the training seminar.



Panel discussion on “links between Trade, Development and Climate Change”.

A series of workshops held over the two days focused more specifically on communication strategy – Europe Direct staff discussed how best to engage with citizens and the media in their respective regions. Alberto Mérida, Information Campaigns Correspondent for the EC Representation in Spain, spoke plainly of the difficulties in communicating EU policies: “The EU poses a communication challenge because it is distant, complex, translated and often boring.” He countered that, despite this perception, “Europe Direct can best reach the lower levels – those closest to the citizens – with targeted information campaigns”.

Roderic Van Voorst of DG TREN echoed this sentiment in another workshop, adding that “there is a risk that the EU is considered to interfere too much in citizens’ lives”. He concluded that consumers must be motivated to change their behaviour, which is better achieved with awareness-raising campaigns and through information centres, which are in an “ideal position to communicate the energy efficiency issues at local level”.

Other advice offered to Europe Direct colleagues at workshops included practical tips when dealing with the media: drawing from his recent experience at the Representation in Spain, Mérida stressed the importance of “good timing” and recommended contacting journalists twice – by phone and by email. He warned against alarmist messages and sensationalism – pointing out that weather and climate are not to be conflated. Workshop participants discussed how best to deal with local press and broadcast outlets who charge for covering European matters, as well as how best to make “good news” interesting to

journalists, stakeholders and the general public.

Cend approached two participants at the conference for their take on the two-day programme and how they see the challenges ahead:

Katie Hornby, European Policy Development Officer for a local council in Northern England (UK): “The conference provided great materials for dissemination. The input on the inter-relationship with trade and climate change means policy-makers are seeing the important synergies between key policy areas. The presence of an NGO – the World Wildlife Fund – on the agenda was a strong indicator of the Commission’s commitment to working in partnership. The biggest challenges we face . . . are encouraging people to see the urgency of the issue whilst at the same time deploying essential long-term thinking and encouraging citizens and industry to adopt the necessary attitude and behaviour. We cannot revert to a ‘business as usual’ complacency.”

Virginie Lamotte, Europe Direct Officer at the Maison de l’Europe des Yvelines in the Île-de-France region (France): “Climate change is becoming a familiar topic for Europeans. But what citizens are less aware about is that a lot of the measures our governments take – to encourage responsible behaviour towards energy efficiency, and preserve our environment and biodiversity – are coming from European initiatives, resolutions and directives. This seminar gives us tools and updates to better explain to citizens how it all works, and find solutions together on a local level with all parties – citizens, local authorities, media, businesses – through the mechanisms of European solidarity and best practice.”

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RAPIDO

Business climate

The Business Climate Indicator for the euro area increased slightly in June. However, the level is still far below the previous historical lows of 1993. This suggests that year-on-year industrial production growth will still have been negative in May and will remain subdued in June. The rise in the BCI reflects an overall easing, except for conditions related to order books. Both order books and export order books continued to worsen, reaching new record lows.

Consumers

What proportion of the EU27 population live in houses or flats, and what proportion own their dwelling? What kind of energy do households consume? What share of consumers makes formal complaints to sellers? What share of the population cross borders to do their shopping? Answers to these questions and many more can be found in the publication “Consumers in Europe”, fourth edition, jointly published by Eurostat and DG SANCO.

‘Milk – Drink it up!’



The winning photo from Hungary

Mariann Fischer Boel announced the three winners of the ‘Milk Power!’ competition during a visit to a school in Paris. This competition is part of the ‘Milk – Drink it up!’ European campaign, which aims to inform Europeans about the benefits of milk and dairy products as a healthy alternative to junk food and drinks. The lucky winners were Benedek Horvath, 1st, from Hungary, Andrea Cremona, 2nd, from Malta, and Teresa Videva, 3rd, from Bulgaria.