

**Textiles**

# Familiar issues confront new president

**A**fter many years as president of the BIR world recycling organisation's Textiles Division, Olaf Rintsch of Germany's Textil Recycling K&A Wenkhaus GmbH passed on the mantle of leadership in Miami to long-time vice president Mehdi Zerroug of Framimex in France.

The latter congratulated his predecessor for 'all that energy' he had brought to the role and expressed deep pride at becoming the division's latest president. However, it was quickly back to business as Zerroug's domestic market report confirmed continuing problems with thefts of originals.

In some cases, he explained, these illegal activities were putting collections in jeopardy. On the upside, he added, the public authorities in France now seemed to be taking the problem seriously, not least because the textiles sector was not alone in having fallen prey to this menace.

Zerroug took over the presidency on a red-letter day for the BIR Textiles Division: it had joined forces with two US organisations - the Secondary Materials and Recycled Textiles Association (SMART) and the Council for Textile

Recycling (CTR) - to stage the first-ever International Textile Recycling Summit; further coverage of this event, staged during the BIR's Miami Convention, will be carried in the August issue of Recycling International.

## General tightening

According to feedback on the US market from SMART vice president and CTR chair Eric Stubin, evidence of the harsh winter weather in parts of the USA earlier this year was continuing to manifest itself through a general tightening within the market and 'mixed rags prices ticking upward'. For US exporters, activity in Africa had remained strong for most of the year to date, although 'a slight blip' in a few East African markets had been related to 'currency inflation north of 5%'.

Contrasting with Stubin's observations, a relatively mild winter in France had resulted in a larger-than-expected supply of originals and in stable prices rather than the normal seasonal increases, according to Zerroug's home market analysis. Rintsch also reported a sufficient supply of originals on the market as well as good demand from Africa despite 'difficulties with the strong Euro'.

Rintsch's company is playing a significant role in the development of a closed-loop clothing concept explained at the Miami meeting by Timo Perschke, founder of PYUA - ECOrrrect Outerwear in Germany. The company is looking to recover its own ecologically-friendly sportswear products for recycling, with the ultimate aim being to use radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology to help ensure their return.

## Premiums 'rocketing up'

Dramatic developments both at home and abroad were outlined by the director of the UK's Textile Recycling Association (TRA), Alan Wheeler. The domestic used clothing and textile market was still experiencing major problems, with 'no sign of when things will get back to normal'. Recent months had brought 'numerous business closures, several hundred job losses and an overall reduction in collection capacity in the UK'.

Wheeler also noted that 'a spate of fires at waste processing facilities has resulted in many insurance companies pulling out of the sector', with a number of TRA members now struggling to find anyone to insure them. 'Even if

they do, the premiums are rocketing up,' he observed.

Furthermore, prices obtainable by UK collectors in the key markets of Eastern Europe and Africa 'are still under a great deal of pressure'. Specifically regarding exports to Africa, currency devaluations in Ghana and Kenya had left importers unable to maintain the same payment levels in pounds sterling, forcing UK exporters to drop their prices. Meanwhile, civil unrest in a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa - notably Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Somalia - had been adversely affecting the movement of goods.

## 'We must defend ourselves'

The implications for recyclers of Germany's 2012 circular economy law were dissected in Miami by Alexander Gläser, executive secretary of Rechstanwalt & Notar. His conclusion was that, in the long term, municipalities could make inroads into collection and, to a lesser extent, sorting. 'But as far as international marketing is concerned, this would not be possible for the municipalities because they don't have the necessary technical skills nor, as far as the legislation is concerned in Germany at least, would they have the right to do so,' he suggested. Thus, he added, marketing was likely to remain the domain of commercial operators. While expecting commercial collections to continue, Gläser issued the following rallying call: 'We must continue to defend ourselves; anyone who does not defend himself will disappear from the market.'



Olaf Rintsch: 'Difficulties with the strong Euro.'



Mehdi Zerroug: collections in jeopardy from theft.



Alan Wheeler: UK exporters forced to drop their prices.



Alexander Gläser: 'We must continue to defend ourselves.'