

Payment for services 'a top priority'



This ship, the 'Fram', has been on two expeditions – with Nansen to the North Pole and with Amundsen to the South Pole. Today, it is moored in dry dock in its own building in Bygdøy near Oslo.

Payment for services rendered was now 'a top priority' if Europe's used textiles industry was to overcome a 'structural crisis', Textiles Division President Frithjof W. Schepke of Germany warned delegates in Oslo.

The sector was confronted by a bewildering array of problems, including: 'a clear reduction in the quality of collected material'; spiralling sorting and transport costs; high insurance premiums for fire cover; irksome customs classifications; falling sales prices; and competition from cheap new clothing from the Far East. At the same time, 'completely ridiculous' EU waste regulations were serving to block potential markets.

'Politicians should be approached to ensure that we are paid for our services and that discriminatory regulations are eliminated,' insisted Mr Schepke, after having earlier underlined that EU used textiles companies give employment to an estimated 150 000 people.

By Ian Martin

Further closures likely

Reports from France, Germany and the U.K. broadly echoed the President's review of market conditions. Benson Greenberg of the U.K., an Honorary President of BIR's Textiles Division, noted two recent bankruptcies affecting major, established European firms before adding: 'Unfortunately, we must predict further closures and bankruptcies in mainland Europe.'

Meanwhile, another Honorary President Klaus Löwer of Germany lamented that governmental support given to recovered textile companies in the U.S. was not available to their EU counterparts, to which Mr Schepke responded: 'We are not looking to hit out at the U.S. - we are just looking for a balance to be achieved.'

A report submitted by John Bull of Smiths in Australia confirmed that market conditions were also difficult on the other side of the world. 'We have had to lower prices just to stop our warehouse overflowing,' he stated. 'Australia is discussing a free trade agreement with the U.S. Currently, the problem is they want free

Europe's used textiles industry was facing the prospect of wholesale business closures unless payment was forthcoming for the services it rendered. Speaker after speaker at the BIR Textiles Division meeting in Oslo underlined the depth of the crisis now facing the sector and the need for dramatic change to ensure survival.

access to Australian markets but are not prepared to offer free access to Australian goods into the U.S.'

Poor stepchild

Michael Sigloch of Germany suggested that customs classifications made life far more difficult for EU exporters compared to their counterparts in the U.S. and in other European countries. He complained: 'We are obstructed and treated like the poor stepchild who nobody wants.' The EU's DG Enterprise representative at the meeting, Alberto Canevali, recognised the severity of the problems afflicting the European used textiles sector and agreed: 'We have to get together to work on this.' However, on the specific issue of customs rules, he regretted that interpretation of provisions differed 'nationally, regionally and among different authorities'. He added: 'It is a general problem - it is not only affecting your sector.'

On a more positive note, he confirmed early moves within the EU to 're-table' the concept of 'waste' and its definition, with the aim of incorporating an economic dimension. He added that the scope of discussions would extend to recycling and that BIR had been invited to participate. 'We are recognising that this is not just an environmental issue,' he said.

Huge potential costs

However, there was a return to less promising news with the presentation of BIR's Environmental & Technical Director

Ross Bartley. He reported on the possibility of an extension of the Basel Convention's scope to cover non-hazardous as well as hazardous 'wastes'. The OECD, meanwhile, was considering a widening of environmentally sound management to cover non-hazardous 'wastes'. The latter threatened to cost the recycling industry between Euro 7 and 15 million each year in consultants' costs linked to third party verification. He told delegates: 'We are trying to keep this to just hazardous waste.'

BIR was also monitoring moves to welcome 10 new countries into European Union membership by May next year. According to Mr Bartley, five of these nations imposed import controls on non-hazardous 'wastes', some of which were 'unworkable'. Given that such barriers to exports were to be discussed at a high-level meeting of correspondents in early July, Mr Bartley invited input from the BIR's Textiles Division. □

For more information on the European textile recycling industry, please read Mr Schepke's Guest Column on page 3.



From left to right: BIR Director General Francis Veys, Benson Greenberg of the U.K., Klaus Löwer of Germany and Textile Division President Frithjof W. Schepke of Germany.