

BIR meets in Prague

Struggling through the toughest of tough times

More than 850 hardy souls from 54 different countries converged on the historic Czech capital Prague in late October for the latest BIR world recycling convention. The adjective 'hardy' is appropriate given that they would have travelled with little expectation of hearing much in the way of good news. And so it proved: business conditions are almost universally difficult and many companies are creaking under the pressure.

E-scrap recyclers: victims of 'a messaging issue'

The BIR e-scrap committee is assessing ways in which it can 'set the record straight' about an e-scrap recycling sector that is suffering the negative consequences of what US Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries (ISRI) president Robin Wiener described as 'a messaging issue'. The sector's image had been tarnished by 'mixed' and 'inconsistent' information, she told a question-and-answer meeting of the committee in Prague chaired by Recycling International's chief editor Martijn Reintjes. Her ISRI colleague Eric Harris, the institute's associate counsel/director of government and international affairs, agreed that promotion of 'good data' over misinformation was 'one of the biggest challenges we have'. Further news on this matter would be issued in due course, confirmed BIR e-scrap committee

With commodity prices suffering precipitous falls and increasing numbers of scrap businesses being forced into retrenchment or even bankruptcy, cheerful news was in short supply at the latest BIR world recycling convention. While delegates were able to appreciate some sunlit autumn days out in the streets of Prague, inside the city's Sheraton hotel & conference centre the atmosphere was grey and at times depressed.

'If this fall in prices continues for another six months, it will mean the end for many scrap businesses across Europe,' a major Dutch metals recycler told Recycling International. And another lamented: 'How much disaster can we handle? Prices have fallen so low that we have become an industry that costs money rather than an industry that makes money.'

The paper division meeting was the odd man out among the open commodity sessions in that declining prices did not feature large on its

chairman Thomas Papageorgiou of Anamet Recycling Industry SA in Greece. Contributors to the meeting in Prague argued that several recent reports - including from some well-respected bodies - contained damaging inaccuracies, most notably with regard to the volumes of e-scrap reportedly 'dumped' in India. Committee member Surendra Borad Patrawari of Gemini Corporation NV said that such reports were based on 'utter ignorance' and that import into India 'is a very difficult process'. The country's e-scrap market was largely domestic in nature as imports were not allowed while exports were 'extremely restricted'. BIR trade & environment director Ross Bartley confirmed that the world recycling body had already challenged a number of inaccurate reports on e-scrap at the highest levels.



Ranjit Baxi: global day for recycling is needed.

agenda. But that certainly doesn't mean life is easy for paper recyclers as contributors to the divisional meeting had their own list of challenges and concerns, including excessive red tape, quality pressures and an economic slowdown in the key market of China.

International Day of Recycling

Just as he had done immediately following his elevation to the world recycling body's top post at the Dubai convention in May, BIR president Ranjit Baxi underlined in Prague his desire to help the organisation to play a 'much more important role' in spreading the good news about recycling. Thanks to recycling, indeed, massive savings in carbon dioxide emissions were being made every day, he said.

In order to convey this good-news message, BIR has recently established a special committee which is to focus on new initiatives, including the potential launch of an International Day of Recycling. There were already regional and national initiatives of this kind and BIR could

well bring these under one umbrella, he suggested. 'We really need a global day for recycling and we should claim our leading position in this as a whole industry,' stressed Baxi. Speaking to Recycling International, he confirmed it was his ambition to have 'the first International Day of Recycling taking place in the year 2016 or 2017'.

Circular Economy package

Quite appropriately, the Circular Economy was a recurring theme at the latest BIR world convention. Having ditched its previous Circular Econ-

omy package, the general expectation is that the European Commission will unveil a more ambitious replacement on December 2 this year.

Speaking at the meeting of the BIR's International Environment Council, Emmanuel Katrakis - secretary general of the European Recycling Industries' Confederation (EuRIC) - echoed the BIR world president in underlining that, through

recycling, 'we save a lot of energy and we save a lot of CO₂ emissions'. For this reason, he hoped the new Circular Economy package would be 'market-driven' and would 'make sense for the recycling industry'. And he continued: 'Recyclers are turning waste into new resources and putting them back into the economy. This is the key link of the Circular Economy, and now what we hope is that this key link will also be reflected in the legislation.'

Regulatory 'distortions'

Having offered EuRIC's support for a ban on the landfilling of recyclables and for measures that progressively phase out incineration of unsorted waste, Katrakis called for a correction of the regulatory 'distortions' that place 'a higher cost burden on downstream users of recycled materials', as well as for a reassessment of the large volume of 'red tape' attaching itself to the



Emmanuel Katrakis: free and fair access to global markets a must.

recycling industry. He also backed the case for stimulating markets for recyclable materials and for greater consideration of recycling at the product design stage - something which he understood would be covered in the European Commission's package. Recyclers also needed 'free and fair access' to the international markets, he added, 'so we get a fair price in Europe and outside of Europe'.

A spokesman for the convention's host country was certainly anticipating an 'ambitious' Circular Economy package from the Commission. Jaromír Manhart, director of the waste management department of the Czech ministry of environment, also noted that the 10-year waste management strategy adopted by his government last year was certainly not lacking in ambition. One of its headline goals is for the Czech Republic to boost its material recovery rate for household waste from less than 35% last year to 60% by 2024. □

Next year's BIR world recycling conventions & exhibitions

Berlin, Germany:

May 30-June 1

Amsterdam, the Netherlands:

October 24-25



Recycling International's Helga Fresen cheered up the masses in Prague with the launch of a new, yearly magazine, Recycling Technology.