

# Priorities layed out for European Commission

FIEC's requests for the new EU term are being explained to candidate MEPs and future European Commissioners ahead of the European elections

**W**ith the European elections being held in a matter of weeks – 23 May to 26 May – and the European Commission winding up current open files with one eye on the future priorities of new commissioners that are due to take office at the end of 2019, FIEC has reflected on the broad needs of the construction industry and, as usual, has produced its manifesto for the new EU political term 2019 to 2024.

Aiming to find the balance between too many issues with too much detail on the one hand, and bland, very general requests on the other, FIEC has opted for four main themes.

These are competitive Europe, digital transformation, sustainable Europe and the social dimension.

Following extensive consultation with its Member Federations in 27 countries, the federation has selected a number of key messages, which are supported by the members, but which do not ask for solutions to problems that are encountered at national level.

The manifesto will eventually be accompanied by more

detailed explanations, targeted at elected MEPs once their new Parliamentary committee responsibilities have been identified, and at European Commissioners when the policy areas which will be relevant to them have been confirmed.

At a national level, CECE Member Federations will also produce supplementary information explaining the national perspective to the MEPs elected in their respective countries.

Not surprisingly, three of the broad themes formed the basis of the last manifesto published in 2014.

This does not mean that FIEC failed to achieve anything during the last five years, but rather that these themes continue to be extremely important for the industry on the one hand, and ongoing EU policy priorities on the other.

## INVESTMENT

Therefore, the call for investment – particularly in infrastructure – and the ongoing improvement of the global financial, fiscal and regulatory environment is emphasised again in the chapter Investing for a competitive Europe.

The familiar demand for quality rather than low price in public sector contracts is accompanied by a plea for fairness, in the face of competition from non-EU contractors who do not always respect EU and local regulations.

Also, they are, in any case, sometimes subsidised by their national governments, and this makes it impossible for EU contractors to match the low prices offered.

Sustainable Europe is tackled with some updated messages, based on the worsening impact of climate change and the urgent need for faster progress towards a Circular Economy.

On the subject of energy efficiency, a stronger message asks for a more holistic approach to building renovation.

This is because FIEC is concerned that quick fixes aimed at reducing energy consumption can prove to be expensive, if the newly energy efficient buildings are subsequently destroyed during a natural or man-made disaster, which could have been avoided with more extensive, structural renovation.

## SOCIAL DIMENSION

The Social Dimension continues to highlight the difficulty of finding skilled workers, the need for a level playing field with regards to employment and working conditions, and the objective of zero accidents.

In addition, the point is made that relevant EU measures should not interfere with national approaches to industrial relations.

Reflecting the rapid changes in the industry and FIEC's response, which has included the setting up of a dedicated working group since the last manifesto, Construction 4.0 appears for the first time in a document published for European elections and a new political term.

There are requests to make construction a priority sector for relevant EU programmes and a request for the development of data policies, aimed at dealing with the transformation to digital construction.

The fact that this subject appears as one of only four

themes shows how important it has become to FIEC and its members.

Furthermore, FIEC repeats its assertion, made recently in several speeches, articles and positions, that digital construction will "help to achieve many of the EU's main policy goals" including energy efficiency, Circular Economy, and health and safety, among others.

While not a new request, but in a slightly different form, a short statement from CECE asks for a vice president to be appointed from the new Commissioners, with special responsibility for ensuring effective co-ordination between the various departments involved in policy making that has an impact on construction.

Many directorates in the European Commission work on relevant issues – energy, environment, climate change, employment and skills, internal market, etc.

While FIEC accepts that the Commission has long since moved away from a sectoral approach to its work, and even acknowledging some improvement achieved via the Construction 2020 initiative co-ordinated by the directorate responsible for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), there remains room for better co-ordination.

FIEC's manifesto for the new political term 2019 to 2024 was expected to be published by the end of February. **ce**



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