Construction 2050:
Building tomorrow's Europe today

In 2012 the European Commission published *Construction 2020*, a developing strategy for the sustainable competitiveness of the construction sector. FIEC joined others in penning a paper in response to the initiative.

If we look ahead and try to project ourselves to 2050, it's plausible that around 75% of the EU population will be living in urban areas; likely smart cities with energy efficient and accessible buildings, made by more efficient products and appliances.

The use of digital technologies from the design phase, throughout the life cycle of the buildings, will aid the development of the circular economy and ultimately to an inclusive transition towards a climate-neutral Europe.

Autonomous transport systems, new delivery technologies, "mobility as a service" such as car and bike sharing services will have completely changed the way in which people and goods move and interact. Smart infrastructure will have improved and made safer the mobility of people and goods across the EU.

In fact, the construction sector is at the heart of our life: construction enterprises and their workers build our homes, our roads and the buildings in which we work or learn.

It is therefore of crucial importance that the new Commission pays particular attention to the main challenges that our sector is facing.

Increase in improved and safer jobs: The construction sector is confronted by the challenge of a significant labour shortage. At the same time there is a need for construction workers to continuously adapt their abilities and competences to new developments such as digitalisation, circular economy and energy efficiency.

De-carbonisation: Buildings are responsible for approximately 40% of energy consumption and 36% of CO_2 emissions in the EU. Hence, they offer a great opportunity for energy efficiency and emissions reduction.

Sustainable construction: Construction, with its linked sectors, is responsible for consuming around half of globally extracted materials, whereas construction and demolition waste accounts for approximately 25-30% of the waste generated in the EU. From the perspective of a circular economy, the sector offers great opportunities for improvement in resource efficiency through material recycling and reuse.

Digital transformation: The industry is on the brink of a digital transformation that will change the status quo forever. However, this transformation needs to be steered in an optimal way to make sure that it adds value for the whole sector and does not leave any player lagging behind.

Research and Innovation: Innovative business models, new materials, digital collaboration and offsite manufacturing are a few examples of the many innovative solutions developed in the construction sector. The challenge is to stimulate more and set the framework for construction companies to adopt and integrate new technologies.

Infrastructure maintenance and investments: Public infrastructure in Europe is ageing and requires maintenance and upgrades. At the same time, the market demands new infrastructures to interconnect the national transport, energy and digital infrastructures. Against this backdrop, a mix of public and private capitals is needed to finance the construction of new and the maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Ensuring a level playing field at the EU and international level: In the construction sector, the lack of/incorrect interpretation of rules has led to practices of unfair forms of competition for construction enterprises and unfair treatment for workers. In addition, the European construction market has attracted third country companies and workers. It is of crucial importance that these players respect all the applicable EU rules – and open their markets on a reciprocal basis.

Urban development and cities: By 2050, cities will be increasingly smart: the relevant sectors of the cities (efficient buildings, renewable energy supply, electric transport, etc) will be linked to one another through integrated planning and new technologies. The construction sector bears the challenge of being fully integrated in this context of smarter urban development and management.

HOW TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES?

Firstly, in a circular economy, the end and beginning of value chains blur. The value chain becomes rather an ecosystem, in which all players are co-dependent, and their collaborative working method based on strong cooperation and transparency. For this reason, European institutions should set an adaptable policy framework to address the evolving construction ecosystem and the transformation of the industry.

Secondly, the construction industry is impacted by EU policy in many key areas. There is a need to ensure that relevant policy frameworks and regulatory measures do not contradict each other, or overlap in a way that creates a burden – and unnecessary expense – for the industry. European institutions and Member States should ensure a holistic approach towards policy making, in order to implement coherent and balanced policies and legislation.

Finally, the high complexity of the construction sector requires a collective effort by public and private businesses, in order to coordinate all activities under a common and shared strategy. The construction sector asks for a strong partnership between European institutions, Member States, construction social partners and stakeholders to steer the transformation of the sector. ce

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