

Ladies and gentleman,

It is my honour as president of the International Recycling Federation to open this recycling conference.

This is an important day for our organization, but also to our Spanish member GERD, who has performed the organization of this conference. They have done an outstanding job and I would very much like to congratulate them.

We have collected here in this room most of the European experience and knowledge on the recycling of construction- & demolition waste. In my view, this is an excellent moment to be present here in Spain, as a society of recyclers.

Everywhere in Europe people have become aware that we need to produce and consume in a more sustainable way. We need to understand that sustainability is more than "having minimal environmental impact".

A true sustainable option also leads to economic benefits and to social benefits. This is exactly what recycling can bring. It has brought sustainable development in many Member States. Other Member States need also to develop into that direction. This moment is a good moment to start it in Spain.

We are of course very aware of the economic recession that Europe is facing, and Spain has been hit gravely by it. Our recycling industry is feeling the impact as well. But, I also think that the recycling industry can pay an important contribution to the recovery of the economy.

And why not start with that process in Spain?

One thing that has become clear due to the economic recession is, that Europe needs to change things. Of course, financial systems have to change. But also the way in which we produce products and the way in which we consume our natural resources.

Our Spanish colleagues in GERD have invested in proper equipment to treat construction- & demolition waste and to produce good quality products from it. The plants they have built can now be used, we only have to secure that waste is actually brought to these plants and that the good products are used, for instance in road construction.

These plants, and many more new plants, will guarantee employment to many workers, also in related industries. It is a duty of the Spanish industry and of the authorities to support this development.

The positive effects of recycling have been acknowledged in many studies. The European institutes have also recognized the important role of recycling.

The European Commission has launched the Lead Market Initiative, assigning the most important markets in the EU to be supported. Recycling is one of those markets which the Commission considers to be a key industry for Europe.

Other strategies of the European Commission also underline the importance of recycling. There can be no Raw Materials strategy without recycling. And the Sustainable Consumption and Production action plan as well addresses the role of recycling.

Most important to all those who are involved in recycling, is the new Waste Framework Directive.

The FIR is happy to see that plans for a Recycling Society have found their way into the Directive. The new target for the recycling of construction- & demolition waste of 70 % in 2020 is meant to be a strong support for recycling.

Indeed, if all Member States will achieve such good results, the consumption of resources in Europe will get much more sustainable.

If we want the new policy of the European Union to be successful, we need a strong voice from the industry.

FIR intends to keep its position of representative of the recycling industry.

In the past we have contributed to the discussions in Brussels, and FIR has been able to achieve some of its main goals.

For instance, recycled aggregates will in the future not anymore be regarded as waste, but as products. We also acknowledge that many forces are at play in Europe, and we need to combine forces with those parties which share our views.

In 2008 FIR has established the European Platform for Recycled Aggregates, EPRA, together with UEPG. UEPG is the European association of the aggregates industry.

It has recognized the value and importance of recycled aggregates and wishes to strengthen the position of it, just like FIR. FIR also believes that individual companies should join forces and work together.

Companies in one country may learn from companies in another country. New technologies or applications of recycled products in one country may be of interest to another country.

The issue is, that we need to establish a possibility to start communication between companies and between countries. In order to do so, FIR launches today the European Recycling Network. This platform must become a common basis for all people and companies involved to exchange information and practical knowledge.

This may be of any issue related to recycling, from legislative issues to technical standards.

The Network does not yet exist.

We need you, and all other people involved, to build this Network. Today and tomorrow we like to give it a start.

If you are interested to know more about leaching in Germany, applications in Belgium, treatment processes in the Netherlands, etc., or if you wish to put questions to your colleagues elsewhere in Europe, you are very much invited to join the FIR/GERD stand in the fair hall.

I wish everyone here a very pleasant and interesting recycling conference.

Thank you very much