



European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations

Representing FIDIC in Europe



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Resume tenders and launch the Green Deal – the only path to sustainability

Commenting on the European Green Deal at a time of Covid-19, EFCA President Kevin Rudden said "Covid-19 has not only posed an immense, unprecedented threat to our way of life; it has usurped Climate Change as the most immediate emergency for the world to tackle. Just as the European Green Deal is laid out, with its considerable ambition, vast budgetary implications and mixed response from 'too much' to 'too little'... the pandemic we have often been warned about but always hoped to avoid, has given us other things to think about – with more immediate concerns for matters of life and death."



Kevin Rudden continued stating that "Digitalisation is enabling us to do more things with social distance. There is a renewed spotlight on communications, and of course on teleworking, working from home. That's an important step in building resistance to pandemics. There has also been a sizeable fall in CO₂ emissions; teleworking was close to zero before Covid-19 and there will be some long-term changes here. The sustainability dividend, if it can be called that, could go further still."



Benoît Clocheret

The incoming president of the European Federation of Engineering Consultancy Associations (EFCA) and CEO of the international Artelia Group, M. Benoît Clocheret, is warning of the dangers for industry and for long-term development when ongoing tenders come to a grinding halt.

Public procurement of hospitals, schools, energy facilities and infrastructure must resume, and swiftly, he says, following its fall by 30, 40 or even 50% in some countries over the last few weeks as a reaction to the coronavirus pandemic. "This is even more true for industry than us," explains M. Clocheret. "We design projects, we are the first steps in the whole value chain. So, if procurement stops for us, it stops also for the construction industry. There is a domino effect down the line that could lead to accelerated economic downturn and layoffs. This is extremely serious."

"We need the EU for its tenders," M. Clocheret continues, "but also as an influencer, a political body, to make sure all member countries don't pause their processes. Countries are focussing on the short-term, taking national decisions, but the reality is that we need a long-term approach now more than ever especially for the challenges we face. We need more Europe, more unity, more co-ordination and more sustainability; we need the new Green Deal."

Faster transition needed

The European Green Deal has been put forward with two main goals – to have no greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and to decouple economic growth from resource use. 'Sustainable' might be more appropriate than the word 'Green', points out M. Clocheret. "The Green Deal covers a lot more than just green energy, the environment, and biodiversity. It was driven by the need to adjust the economy and construction sector to the climate change and zero pollution challenge – which is a systemic and global challenge. And this current pandemic is also a global challenge. They are both a result of the world going somehow sideways, certainly not going in the right direction."

"We have to accelerate the transition to a more sustainable world, a more sustainable future – with regards to climate, to combatting pollution or poverty, and also in the way we become more resilient to pandemics. In the short term we can adjust the funding going to different types of project but in the long run, and in a broad sense, they all concern the same thing – sustainability."

Legislative proposals, funds, creativity – we are ready

The Green Deal calls for projects to address eight central objectives: clean energy, sustainable industry, building and renovating, sustainability mobility, preserving biodiversity, sustainable food systems, eliminating pollution, and climate action.



"Look at the main areas: Building Renovation, the Circular Economy, Zero Pollution, Energy, Mobility... they all start with the need to design the infrastructure. This is our daily life and provides many opportunities for our industry; a lot of responsibilities too," he adds.

To that end, Kevin issues a reminder of the importance for clients to recognise the need to take lifecycle costs into account, of recognising the engineering industry as one you need to invest in to save money ten-fold further down the line.

Finally Mr Rudden reminded that "As one of the European industries with the strongest presence and longest track record in low and middle-income countries, we have been working for decades with European development institutions in bringing prosperity to these regions. It's time to take a big step forward in promoting a more sustainable and greener growth. European Consulting Engineers have the capabilities to contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the external dimension of the European Green Deal, by preparing climate-friendly public and private investment projects and introducing new solutions, management processes, and innovative practices that accelerate the achievement of SDGs. Therefore consulting engineers should be considered as 'Sustainable Investments Catalysts'.



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An ambitious €1 trillion mobilisation package backs it and legislation is being drawn up to support it. The incentives are there. But what worries M. Clocheret, and EFCA member associations, is the hesitation in moving forward on it.

The engineering and construction sector is directly involved in at least six of the eight objectives, and indirectly in all. M. Clocheret is optimistic about the sector's capacity to respond. "We are ready" he declares, "we have been ready for quite some time. And we are excited by the new goals. The engineering industry in Europe is one of the best and having demanding objectives and targets raises the bar for everybody. It might be difficult but people will bring out the best in themselves, be more creative and innovative. Authorities must play their part too," he adds, "by making sure the legislation enables creativity."

Working together and spreading the costs

Innovation demands intelligent design. "This is our life," M. Clocheret says simply. "The Green Deal brings a lot of opportunities but also a lot of responsibilities and we know that. We need to be as smart as we have ever been, in terms of optimising designs as financial constraints accelerate. We need to move in a smarter way, manage construction and whole life-cycle costs of a project." In recent years the life-cycle approach has led many clients to reduce overall project costs by shifting the spending up front: a little more in design, far less in construction, operations and maintenance thanks to optimized designs. "This is clearly the right path," he says.

He also points out that engineers are the best allies of public authorities to select the most effective and sustainable projects. Complex bids need dialogue and shared expertise from the very beginning, for example, with balanced assessment criteria that promote the most 'economically advantageous' bids. "It is vital to check how green a project is, how far it can address the climate question, how resilient it is in the face of terrorism, or in its capacity to master the risk of pandemics, beyond just its cost," explains M. Clocheret.

"With the pandemic and the new Green Deal on the table at the same time, it is a good opportunity to hammer that one more time," declares M. Clocheret. "And to see that we need the best brains to achieve this and you get those through an appropriate procurement process. Authorities are more than ever ready to take action as they understand this."

Changing mindsets

Countries are at different levels of maturity on dealing with the life-cycle concept, with Scandinavia and the Anglo-Saxon world ahead of the game adapting their approaches in procurement and in design. Pushed by harsh winters, the Danes for example, are incorporating it in their innovative designs for district heating systems. In Paris, a city with an education sector facing combined economic and environmental challenges, more than 150 schools are costing ahead as they commission renovations to reduce energy consumption by up to 40%.

More changes will come as Europe moves out of the day-to-day restrictions imposed because of the pandemic, with 'social distancing' and other behavioural changes, likely to persist. "We will see greater digitalisation, re-localisation, of food production for example, and cleaner energy, possibly nuclear. It's a matter of changing mindsets, balancing performance and cost as countries build resilience and target sustainable development goals. The pandemic has made us see we must be more resilient and continue to create the new infrastructure and buildings we need. The European Green Deal is demanding," concludes M. Clocheret, "but it's the only path to a sustainable future for our societies – and including pandemics risk in future designs is part of that."

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EFCA has member associations in 28 countries, and is the sole European federation lobbying on behalf of engineering consultancy and related services, a sector that employs around one million staff in Europe. EFCA contributes with a strong and cohesive input to legislative actions of its national associations on issues affecting market conditions. Furthermore, the organisation works as a Europe-wide platform for national associations and their member firms to gather relevant facts and discuss issues with their counterparts.