

Brussels, 22 December 2017

Two steps forward, one step back – Estonia’s EU Presidency in review

Europe’s engineering and tech industries welcome the Estonian Presidency’s progress on industrial and digital policy, but quick-fix agreements on Clean Energy risk slowing Europe’s energy transition and damaging industry’s competitiveness

As 2017 draws to a close, it is a good time to reflect on the progress made by the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union over the last six months. As the voice of the European engineering and technology industries, Orgalime has been clear on what will deliver the best outcome for the EU and its citizens: a modern, forward-looking industrial strategy that helps our industries to create jobs and growth, attract investment back to the EU, and make products for a smarter, cleaner and healthier Europe.

How did Estonia fare? When it comes to industrial strategy, there can be no doubt that it delivered: in its response to September’s Commission Communication on a renewed EU industrial policy strategy, the Presidency called for more ambition and strategic long-term objectives – a message reinforced by the Competitiveness Council conclusions in November. Plus, as a digital pioneer among EU Member States, Estonia succeeded in putting the digital dimension right at the top of the political agenda, focusing on key topics such as the data economy, cybersecurity and skills development. At a time when industrial digitisation is really beginning to pay dividends for engineering and technology firms, with projected 4% growth in Orgalime’s industries this year, this has not come a moment too soon. “We believe that this combination of an ambitious approach to industrial policy and an understanding of the central role of digital technology is exactly what the EU needs to stay competitive today and in the future,” commented Malte Lohan, Director General Designate of Orgalime.

Going beyond the broader brushstrokes of industrial and digital policy, the Presidency ‘walked the talk’ on mainstreaming industrial competitiveness concerns in other areas, too; for example in the Tallinn E-Energy Declaration signed in September, or the agreement on a well-balanced amendment to the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directive. Progress was made in trade policy, too, with movement on key free trade agreements and the achievement of a sensible political compromise on trade defence instruments. “This is the sort of big-picture thinking across the policy spectrum that makes the EU an attractive place to invest and do business,” underlined Malte Lohan.

However, the Presidency did not always manage to strike the right balance over its six-month term. Despite the EU’s ambition to become a global leader in clean energy, for example, it appears the Council has watered down the ambition of the European Parliament and Commission in negotiations on the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. And compromises made on other Clean Energy proposals risk slowing Europe’s energy transition – and in the process damaging the competitiveness of the technology industries which are driving the change. “While it is important to move the agenda forward,” explains Malte Lohan, “we do not believe that quick-fix agreements

Orgalime, the European Engineering Industries Association, speaks for 42 trade federations representing the mechanical, electrical, electronic, metalworking & metal articles industries of 23 European countries. The industry employs nearly 11 million people in the EU and in 2016 accounted for some €2,000 billion of output. The industry represents over a quarter of the output of manufactured products and over a third of the manufactured exports of the European Union.

www.orgalime.org

should come at the expense of the right final outcome.” Plus, there are concerns that this week’s Council conclusions on eco-innovation have not sufficiently recognised the need to protect technology leaders’ know-how and IPR – and that the deal reached on the Waste Package risks disrupting the functioning of the Internal Market.

Now, it will be up to the Bulgarian Presidency to live up to the goal the Council itself has set for the EU: mainstreaming the concerns of industrial competitiveness across all policy areas. Orgalime is glad to see a long-term industrial strategy and the digital economy retaining their prominent place on the agenda of the Bulgarian Presidency. As Malte Lohan concludes: “We are hoping to see swift action on the Commission’s proposal on market surveillance, which would support European companies by ensuring a level playing field in the Internal Market. And we are calling on the Bulgarian Presidency to prioritise the Clean Energy package and inject momentum and ambition back into the process – so that we can unlock the full potential of the energy transition for the benefit of all Europeans.”

Ends

Notes for Editors:

Notes



The European Engineering Industries Association

ORGALIME aisbl | BluePoint Brussels | Boulevard A Reyers 80 | B1030 | Brussels | Belgium
Tel: +32 2 206 68 83 | e-mail: secretariat@orgalime.org
Ass. Intern. A.R. 12.7.74 | VAT BE 0414 341 438