

## 4<sup>th</sup> Pro Europe Congress

### Opening speech by Bernard Hérodin

When you are in a town where some years ago a novelist wrote a master piece called metamorphosis, the novelist being Franz Kafka, you know we are in the right town.

When you are in a town where a long time ago, somebody created from mud a being by the name of 'Golem' which in Hebrew means life and, without its first letter, death, you know you are in the right city, the city of recycling.

It gives me great pleasure, as President of Pro Europe, to declare this 4<sup>th</sup> Congress open. I am also delighted to see so many familiar faces from the previous Congresses, in Madrid, Berlin and Paris. And I extend a warm welcome to all the new faces.

A great many changes have taken place since the creation of Pro Europe in 1995. At that time, two big countries – France and Germany – saw the need to join forces and present a united front to European and national institutions. Together they built a set of shared guidelines for good practice. Whilst respecting the environment and continuing to work towards the free movement of goods, they introduced the Green Dot symbol.

These two pioneers were subsequently joined by other countries: Belgium, Austria, Spain and Luxembourg. In 2000 there were eleven of us. Today there are thirty-one, including twenty-five of the twenty-seven EU Member States, two candidate countries and four countries from outside the EU.

Our mission is threefold:

- To promote our trademark, which symbolises industry financing (and therefore consumer financing) of package recycling initiatives instead of financing from local authorities and the taxpayer;
- To enter into dialogue with the institutions, in order to incorporate more harmony and respect into regulations in the interest of all stakeholders and the environment;
- To exchange ideas on best practices so as to achieve greater ecological awareness and an ever increasing economic efficiency.

This mission has been accomplished with success and I think we can all take pride in this achievement. But we can now go on to even greater heights.

The symbol appears on 500 billion packages, which makes it the most prevalent logo in the world. However we recognise that the "Green Dot" is sometimes misinterpreted by the consumer; this calls for an information campaign. This subject will be broached during the Congress.

Our dialogue with the institutions, particularly those in Europe, is high-quality, which is demonstrated by the presence of Members of the European Parliament (Mrs Pilar Ayuso, Mrs Mojca Dracar Murko) and the European Commission representatives (Mrs

Annette Schaefer) being among us, here today. We must enhance this dialogue further. But, above all, we should remain vigilant with regard to national institutions. They are subject to budgetary constraints, which often lead them to consider the environment, and particularly packaging, as a source of revenue via eco-taxes. We are all familiar with this debate. The role of Pro Europe is to bring an objective vision that will clarify the future decision-making of those in power.

Alternatives to extended producer responsibility and selective collection will also be covered in this Congress.

Our discussions have been expanding and becoming more productive. You will benefit from the results of our many efficient working groups on technical issues, such as prevention.

Striking proof of the success of eco-organisations is provided by the increasing number of companies in each of our member countries, which are handling new streams in municipal, industrial or commercial waste. To mention the most common, we have WEEE, cars, batteries and accumulators and tyres. We are also seeing the emergence of textiles, bulky waste, including furniture, hazardous waste and medical and healthcare waste. This demonstrates the relevance of the opportunities that have opened up as a result of the extended producer responsibility initiative.

We have been strengthened by our success but risks are still present: deposit systems, eco-tax, dogmatic solutions without any objective analysis and the financial needs of individual States. But risks can also be created by industry itself, for example when products are marketed in extravagant packaging, which has been designed without due regard for the environment.

Consumers have evolved and we have encouraged them in this. When sorting waste for collection becomes a reflex reaction, it provides real training in social responsibility and it changes behaviour. Indeed, when a consumer is confronted eight or ten times a day with an item of packaging waste that needs to be put into the appropriate container, it is inevitable that behaviour will change.

This happens in several areas:

- In terms of waste itself, increasing experience leads to increasing quality and performance;
- In terms of the environment, the scope of the consumer's commitment to adopting changes in behaviour widens: to water and energy consumption, for example;
- In terms of consumption, consumers' buying patterns adjust according to a realistic perception of their own needs.

Companies should know this and it should be an opportunity for them to ensure that their marketing managers are increasingly in tune with the needs of their customers. The Congress will address and, above all, debate this theme.

Over the last few months, the French packaging eco-organisation, Eco-Emballages, has been a key participant in a big presidential initiative: the French government's public consultation programme for sustainable development, called "*le Grenelle de l'Environnement*". Numerous open and challenging debates have been opened relating

to about 300 collective commitments. Of these, 26 apply to waste and 13 directly affect Eco-Emballages; I would like to think that this dynamic initiative will be repeated in your own countries for the greater good of the environment and the economy.

Last thing : I know every speaker, every participant will try to be consistent in this Congress. But as chairman I would like to focus your minds on priority, not to push you to guilt but to further open your minds to awareness and responsibility.

First : packaging is important and recycling is a necessity, but I would like you to question the fact that we have more food in our waste bins than the majority of human beings have on their plates.

Second : do not forget the 100.000 dead in Burma and China. Most of them did not enjoy the benefits of industrial development, but they suffered from global warming, and climate change - which are its consequence.

I hope that this Congress will demonstrate our collective determination, and that the integration of the Third Youth Eco-Parliament will be an illustration of our confidence in the future and our desire to contribute to the future with pride and enthusiasm.

I wish you a productive and responsible congress.

Bernard Hérodin  
Pro Europe President  
Chief Executive, Eco-Emballages