

PRESS RELEASE: First edition of the EFIC Furniture Days on 19 May paves the way for an ever closer collaboration in the furniture value chain and reinforces industry commitment to circularity objectives

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On 19 May the European Furniture Industries Confederation hosted the ‘Furniture Day 2022’, an event organised to create a cross value chain discussion about the furniture industry, its future competitiveness and positive societal impact. Policymakers, furniture industry and supply chain representatives debated about the impact of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine on the furniture value chain, as well as about the opportunities of unlocking the twin transition – circular economy and digitalisation.

President Edi Snaidero spoke about the importance of the furniture industry in Europe and worldwide, a sector that contributes greatly to the economy and quality of everyday life, is highly labour intensive, dynamic, versatile and design oriented. President Snaidero reminded of the challenges brought about by the pandemic and war in Ukraine, which is first and foremost a human catastrophe. With the two crises, the industry has faced shortages and increased prices of raw materials and logistics bottlenecks, but there has also been a new focus on people’s homes. He called for increased collaboration across the supply chain and reminded that EFIC affiliated the Ukrainian furniture industry association in a sign of solidarity in difficult times.

Professor Dr Sascha Peters of Haute Innovation referred to the ecological footprint of humanity and how we are overstepping ourselves when it comes to the Earth’s biocapacity used. This shows an urgent need to embrace sustainability. Prof Dr Peters believes the furniture sector has a large sustainability potential and he gave many examples of circular business models giving a second life to furniture, including marketplaces for rental or using waste materials for new furniture. He also gave insightful examples to show the potential of innovation: alternative secondary resources for boards, leather, fabrics or foam, and ways to avoid glues or resins, enabling dismantling and modularity.

Participants then heard from Maila Puolamaa, Principal Administrator for the Forest-based industries at the European Commission, about the importance of the furniture industry in the European bioeconomy and the potential of circular economy to tackle disruptions in global supply chains. She also spoke of industrial policies aimed at increasing the EU’s strategic capacity, key to deliver on green and digital ambitions, among others.

In a panel discussion with furniture industry and supply chain representatives Jan Kurth of VDM, Stina Wallström of IKEA, Giovanni del Vecchio of Giorgetti, Martin Brettenthaler of Swiss Krono and Andre Dorner of Blum, the focus was on their organisations’ efforts to tackle the challenges of the pandemic and war in Ukraine. It became clear that we need a deeper integration in the furniture supply chain model to better address fluctuations in demand, as well as increased flexibility and communication. Panellists also touched upon the need for stable energy supplies and raw material availability, by reducing dependencies and increased diversification. They stressed the potential of the circular economy to alleviate material procurement difficulties, including the cascading use of wood principle. Among other key demands to policymakers were the need for harmonised EU legislation, redefining the definition of waste and a level playing field with imported products.

The afternoon session was opened by EFIC Secretary General Gabriella Kemendi, who stressed the commitment of the furniture industry with circular economy initiatives and the need for the industry to be accompanied in the transition. She also referred to the need for *one* EU circular economy instead of 27 different ones, as EFIC recently advocated for with the packaging forum coalition.

Matjaž Malgaj of the European Commission and coordinator of the Sustainable Products Initiative presented the recently published package of circular economy initiatives, including a proposal for an Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR). Mr Malgaj referred to the ambitions of ending the

'take, make, break, and throw away' model and making sustainable products the norm, the ESPR being a key proposal to attain those goals. The framework legislation, which will be supplemented by product specific delegated acts - potentially also on furniture - introduces some key product aspects such as durability, reusability, reparability, presence of substances of concern, recycled content, among others. Based on thorough impact assessments it will be decided which ecodesign, performance and information requirements – for example an electronic product passport - will apply to different products. Mr Malgaj also referred to an improved process of adopting Ecodesign measures, including participation of stakeholders in the Ecodesign Forum.

Three furniture industry representatives reacted to the package of proposals in a panel discussion. Cathy Dufour of l'Ameublement Français, Robin Ljungar of TMF and Kees Hoogendijk of CBM spoke of national initiatives to support the industry's transition to a more circular economy, as well as of the potential the furniture industry has for becoming more circular. However, circular economy is not new in the industry, which produces long-lasting products, including with renewable materials such as wood. There are many frontrunners that have integrated circular design and circular business models in their practices. As examples, EPR schemes for furniture and mattresses exist - such as in France for furniture - as well as projects to recover materials, such Wood Loop in the Netherlands. They stressed that a circular economy will be the key contribution to climate neutrality objectives and Sustainable Development Goals. Also, the importance of harmonised rules at EU level, of accompanying SMEs in the transition, of addressing costs and administrative burden and giving incentives.

A wrap-up session followed, with S&D Member of Parliament Patrizia Toia, Presidents of national furniture industry associations Philippe Moreau (France), Maria Porro (Italy, also Salone President), Jan Desmet (Fedustria), and Wood.BE's Director Chris de Roock. The focus was on collaborative systems to reduce carbon footprint - repair reuse recycle - and on reaping the potential of digitalisation, data sharing and innovation. The importance of treasuring all materials, of the cascading use of wood and of re-defining 'waste'. The need of common efforts through the value chain and harmonised EU rules, all crucial to help companies to face the transformations ahead. On the ESPR: it can make European producers more competitive, but it will be important to control its implementation on the market. MEP Patrizia Toia referred to the need for strategic autonomy and industrial alliances, stable energy supplies, harmonisation of circular economy rules, among others, offering her support to the industry in upcoming years.

President Snaidero closed the event by thanking all participants, event moderator Mariam Zaidi, speakers, sponsors Swiss Krono Group and Blum, as well as the EFIC team. He concluded:

"Today we've come together to discuss the future of the European furniture industries and I believe the goal of the event was reached: to represent the voice of the industry. I heard many keywords today. Togetherness - needed to address challenges and opportunities as an ecosystem. Dynamism and versatility of the industry, as well as its positive contribution to the wellbeing of society. Complexity - with many materials and suppliers - showing the importance of addressing challenges and opportunities together. Unfortunately, pandemic and war, which have brought uncertainty and showed the need for a better integration in supply chains, the need to reduce dependencies, for stable energy supplies and raw materials availability. Last but not least, circular economy, which can lead to more resilient supply chains and new business opportunities, with the furniture industry being ready to embark on the journey and many frontrunners already promoting circular business practices. The need for collaboration with value chain, policymakers and standardisation bodies to make circular economy a reality, but also with consumers, who need to believe in it. Thank you"

Watch recording and download materials here: <https://www.efic.eu/furnitureday2022>

EFIC is the European Furniture Industries Confederation, representing over 70% of the total turnover of the European Furniture Industries, a sector employing 1 million people in about 120.000 enterprises across the EU and generating a turnover of over 100 billion Euros. <https://www.efic.eu/>

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