



Adapting to Climate Change: Architects Indispensable

BRUSSELS, 6 December 2010: Architecture is a key profession in reducing the effects of climate change, as energy use in buildings is one of the major producers of green house gases. Measures are needed to ensure that the current economic crisis does not lessen architects' ability to adapt to climate change. This is the main message that emerges from the Architects Council of Europe (ACE) conference held on Friday 3rd December in the European Parliament.

In their work architects have the opportunity to provide a "role model" for other citizens in sustainable development, and in involving society in the future of the planet. The Conference, held as part of the activities to mark the ACE's 20th anniversary, debated forthcoming European Directives, which could affect the course of architecture over the next ten years. This is in keeping with the ACE's belief in the importance of collaborating with the EU in the design of legislation.

Training and mobility are necessary to spread sustainable practices

During the morning session, participants debated moves to enable architects and architectural practices to work across borders in Europe, and in particular the impact of the two relevant Directives: the Professional Qualifications Directive and Services in the Internal Market. Many participants stressed the importance of standardising the training period across Europe as this encourages the exchange of architects between Member States especially in order to exchange sustainable practices thus safeguarding the professionalism of the sector. Architects were dismayed at the reluctance of the European Commission to consider increasing the duration of architects' education and training in the upcoming modernisation of the Professional Qualifications Directive.

Concern was expressed that any moves to deregulate the sector through the Services Directive could lead to a decline in architectural services. This would impact on good quality design that protects the environment and benefits consumers.

Reaching sustainability in the current business environment

In the afternoon's debate on the business environment for architects in Europe, architects demanded changes to Public Procurement to ensure quality based selection for architectural services, especially an increased use of architectural design contests as the current approaches are restricting the market. Additionally participants insisted that despite the current difficult circumstances in which many architects operate, quality and sustainability must not give way to price in the award of contracts.

During the debate on the Recast Energy Performance in Building Directive (all new buildings in the EU to be nearly zero-energy by 2020) it was pointed out that Directives of this nature provide a significant opportunity for sustainable architecture, by raising the bar for energy-saving measures in buildings.

The conference also learnt of findings of the ACE Sector Survey on trends in the architectural sector. A significant finding was that architects believe so strongly in their work as harbingers of the built environment and producers of sustainable buildings that they are prepared to work for a relatively low salary, despite a long training period.

In drawing the Conference to a close, Jos Leyssens, the ACE Vice-President said: "Architects play a significant role in finding solutions to today's major challenges, in the design of sustainable buildings and of a quality built environment that European citizens expect and deserve".

International visitors mark the ACE's 20th Anniversary

On the evening of the Conference, the ceremony to mark ACE's 20th anniversary was opened by Selma Harrington, President of the ACE. The ceremony was addressed by a number of international speakers, including Rosen Plevneliev, Minister of Regional Development and Public Works in Bulgaria; Louise Cox, President of the International Union of Architects; Andrey Bokov, President of the Union of Architects of Russia, and Tom Vonier on behalf of Georg Miller, President of the Architects Institute of America.