

## Breakfast Roundtable Report

# Fire Safety in Buildings: What role for the EU?

European Parliament – ASP 0 G – MEP Salon 4

8<sup>th</sup> October 2019

08 :00 – 10 :00

### Participants:

MEP Pernille Weiss (EPP, DK), Jesper Krog, assistant	Elie Van Strien - European Fire Safety Alliance
MEP Theresa Griffin (S&D, UK), Antonio Mattiello, assistant	Chris Addiers - Fed. of the European Fire Officer Assoc.
MEP Seán Kelly (EPP, IE)	Krzysztof Biskup - European Fire Safety Alliance
MEP Jackie Jones (S&D, UK)	Alan Brinson - European Fire Sprinkler Network
MEP Juozas Olekas (S&D, LT)	Benoît Dôme - Forum for European Electrical Safety
MEP Marion-Erika Walsmann (EPP, DE)	Isabel de Castro - Flame Retardants Europe
MEP Carlos Zorrinho (S&D, PT)	Perrine Ethuin - Modern Building Alliance
Xavier Van Loo, office of MEP Željana Zovko (EPP, HR)	Finian Joyce - Leitrim City Council and FEU
Miklos Gyorgyjakab, office of MEP Ádám Kosa (EPP, HU)	Alberto Lampasona - Europacable
Fulvia Raffaelli - European Commission – DG GROW	Shane Lyons - Ei Electronics
Heikki Väänänen - European Commission – DG GROW	Rozenn Maréchal – MSSI-Electrical
Roberto Enseñat Waser - European Commission – DG JUST	Margaret McNamee - Int. Assoc. For Fire Safety Sciences
Quentin de Hulst - Modern Building Alliance	Guido Sabatini – European Aluminium

### Summary

#### *Introduction*

After a short welcome by Quentin de Hulst, the two MEPs hosting the event Pernille Weiss (EPP) and Theresa Griffin (S&D) explained why they want to keep fire safety on the political agenda of the EU Parliament.

By not only being concerned about the wellbeing of their constituents, but also their families, both took a very personal perspective. For Weiss, the often theoretically discussed issue needs to be broken down to a very practical level. According to her, people simply need to prevent any fires.

Griffin pointed out very clearly that fire safety is not about political parties but about saving lives. The awareness for this topic should not only be refreshed but written in every relevant piece of EU legislation.

To lay out the structure for the upcoming discussion and to bring everybody up to speed, Quentin de Hulst presented the seven layers of fire safety in buildings.

As Head of the Unit “Clean Products and Technologies” in DG GROW, Fulvia Raffaelli explained the ongoing developments of the European Commission on the topic of Fire Safety in buildings. She highlighted that even though fire safety is the responsibility of the Member States, which all had very different approaches and traditions, the EU could still do a lot to drive forward a common set of solutions. That is the aim of the EU Fire Information Exchange Platform established two years ago and which has, for example, already identified smoke detectors as a highly beneficial measure in preventing fire fatalities.

Raffaelli outlined the feasibility study mission given to DG JRC for the development of a European Fire Safety Engineering Code. Raffaelli observed that the interest for the Fire Information Exchange Platform (FIEP) is mainly coming from stakeholders and invited MEPs to encourage their Member State to participate much more. Raffaelli also thanked the European Parliament for the pilot project on statistics and committed to report regularly to the Parliament about its progress: a call for tender will be published soon. Regarding the development of a European

method for assessing the fire performance of facades, Raffaelli summarised progress and noted that the decision by Member States for the alternative approach means that it will take more time.

Finally, Raffaelli discussed the study on smoke toxicity from construction products in case of fire, which concluded that it is not justified to regulate on this aspect in relation to construction products, because many items contribute to smoke toxicity, starting from the building content.

#### *Open discussions*

Reacting to Ms Raffaelli input, Ms Griffin claimed that UK should remain involved in the FIEP and that MEPs have a clear role to play to encourage their country to contribute to it. She noted that building contents are as important as construction products. Chris Addiers emphasized that “people” must be added, fire safety concerns buildings, content and people. The three aspects are interconnected and must be carefully considered to improve fire safety. Finian Joyce highlighted the challenge of dealing with smoke related to the content of buildings, stressing the importance of prevention and product safety, particularly with furniture. He referred to the research undertaken by FEU via IFV in the Netherlands on testing methods for flammability of furniture. Currently UK and Ireland have furniture standards in place. FEU would like the rest of Europe to address this question and is discussing it with major manufacturers. Elie van Strien (EuroFSA) also identified people’s general negligent behavior as a crucial factor and stressed the importance of awareness.

Pernille Weiss MEP and Chris Addiers (FEU) also highlighted that changing demography is playing an important role. Single person households and the elderly are facing the highest risk, as shown by EuroFSA work on statistics. Finian Joyce highlighted the importance of the work of the FIEP group working on fire statistics and the need to collect accurate information on smoke alarms. He referred to the development in Ireland as part of Census 2021 where a question on the ownership of working smoke alarms is going to be included for the first time.

Jackie Jones (S&D) confirmed the need for a holistic approach of fire safety rather than a piece by piece implementation, which takes all existing measures into account.

Moreover, Seàn Kelly (EPP) advocated for making fire safety part of the retrofit when renovating buildings as fire safety is also part of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD). Quentin de Hults referred to the Commission recommendation on renovation that addresses the topic. He highlighted that renovation work must be undertaken correctly for all safety aspects and also that renovation is an opportunity to inspect electrical installations, install smoke alarms, check compartmentation and evacuation routes and possibly retrofit sprinklers. Fulvia Raffaelli added that building renovations should cover a large range of themes to increase the quality of houses such as: energy efficiency, renewable energy, smartness, fire safety, ... a toolbox covering all these aspects can raise awareness and push for holistic approaches to building renovation.

#### *Prevention*

Finian Joyce presented information on BFireSAfe@School, a currently running Erasmus+ project. Targeting teenagers, this project raises awareness and highlights their personal responsibility in keeping themselves safe from fire risks. This initiative will deliver a flexible online training programme of 10 modules with a handbook for teachers which will be translated into eight European languages. It builds on the sharing of best practice from many European countries. It is hoped to integrate this programme into the curriculum across Europe. The final project event will take place in March 2021 in Brussels. He will encourage MEPs and other fire stakeholders to join.

Such prevention work has a great impact on fire safety and further European funding would be appreciated. Theresa Griffin mentioned that European Social Funds should be used to equip Fire Fighters in their mission to work on prevention as part of the European Vision of “caring”. In addition, she recommended to work with the Directorate-General of Regional and Urban policy and with the new Commissioner Designate for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira. She also highlighted the link between energy poverty and fire vulnerability and encouraged liaison with the energy poverty observatory.

Chris Addiers (FEU) added that Estonia is another example, where an excellent community awareness campaign reduced the number of fatalities by more than 50% and suggested a “best practices arena” be established in which similar risk profiles can be identified and discussed.

Juoza Olekas (S&D) stressed the importance of the involvement of other sectors like education. EU means for education could be used for fire safety and also to support the organization of fire services, particularly in new Member States that can probably learn a lot from others on the way to organize fire services efficiently, including for prevention.

Benoît Dôme (FEEDS) stressed that electricity is a major cause of fire and that a report on it will be published during the EU Fire Safety Week. According to him, inspections of electrical installations are an absolute necessity when new technologies are being installed in order to facilitate the transition to zero carbon energy. The procedure would neither be unreasonably costly nor very time-consuming, but would contribute significantly to safety. He also highlighted that the increase risk of flooding due to climate change will increase the risks for electrical installations.

Rozenn Maréchal (MSSI-Electrical) called for a better EU-wide market surveillance, a national competence, to prevent unsafe and non-compliant electrical products from being sold in Europe, increasingly via online shops. She welcomed the new market surveillance regulation that has been adopted this year, stressed the importance to have deterrent sanctions for non-compliant products and to enhance collaboration between Member States and industry on market surveillance.

Mr Enseñat-Waser from DG JUST explained the RAPEX, a tool focusing specifically on safety issues while general compliance is the role of the unit dealing with one specific product regulation, like DG Grow for construction products. Related to online shops, he mentioned a voluntary agreement established with major players like Alibaba and Amazon who committed to remove from their platform products notified within RAPEX.

MEP Theresa Griffin concluded that involving several DGs is important.

### *Detection*

Shane Lyons (Ei Electronics) gave an overview of the inconsistent residential smoke alarm landscape in Europe, with them being mandatory in only 13 European countries. Participating MEPs were surprised to learn that such basic fire safety measure is not implemented all over Europe. They will question the Commission on this aspect. Shane Lyons reminded that residential smoke alarms are considered as construction products within the CPR and stated that current the product standard EN14604 should be complemented by installation guidelines and maintenance obligations in each member state.

### *Early Suppression*

According to Alan Brinson (EFSN), many people think that all fire sprinklers trigger at the same time in case of a fire. In fact, generally only one or two of them in immediate proximity of the fire source are activated. After debunking this myth, he made the case for sprinklers stating that they reduce the risk of fire deaths by 80% and generate local jobs.

European Regional Development Funds can be used for retrofitting buildings with regard to energy efficiency and seismic safety. It should be investigated whether retrofitting sprinklers into older tower blocks could also be supported.

Chris Addiers pointed out that, due to the importance to fight climate change, technological advancements in this field all too often are not enough checked for fire safety, and, therefore, pose serious threats, as already seen in easily inflammable car batteries. In order to prevent this from happening and to advocate for fire safety more effectively, Pernille Weiss recommended to utilize the European Climate Adaptation Platform. Fulvia Raffaelli stressed the importance to make sure that renovation in the context of the green transition is holistic, there is a need to develop a toolbox for quality and safety in construction.

### *Compartmentation and structural safety*

Pernille Weiss MEP stated that fire safety is also a matter of skills allowing the combination of architectural creativity with fire safety. It is very important to provide flexibility in building design and fire safety engineering methods can help with this. Fire safety should be part of all architects' education. As the representative from academia, Margaret McNamee (Lund University and IAFSS) called for more fire safety research and better recognition of the field of fire safety engineering. According to her and the recently published IAFSS Agenda 2030 for a Fire Safe World, fire engineering research needs to be integrated into societally-transformative risk mitigation and resiliency initiatives to better characterize the problems and develop solutions.

Guido Sabatini (European Aluminium) and Alberto Lampasona (Europacable) addressed the MEPs present with some concrete requests, e.g. a harmonized European standard for fire safety doors has been developed but is not cited yet in the official journal, and stressed the benefits and importance of the Construction Products Regulation while pointing out that defining rules is not always sufficient as proper implementation and market surveillance activities are vital for the CPR activities.

Finally, the assistant of Mr Ádám Kósa (EPP) stressed the importance of thinking about disabled people in case of a fire, a topic on which Mr Ádám Kósa has been working particularly within the European Parliament.

### *Conclusions*

In his conclusion, Elie van Strien appreciated the willingness of all participants to act and, once again, underlined the importance of a holistic approach. He stressed the key role of the Fire Information Exchange Platform into which Member States must be encouraged to participate much more. Supporting the FIEP is the ambition of the European Fire Safety Week (EFSW) that is organized by European Fire Safety Alliance in November with all participating stakeholders. He invited MEPs to join the events and particularly the opening of the EFSW and ceremony of the European Fire Safety Award on the 18<sup>th</sup> November in the European Parliament. The outcome of the week will be presented into a report defining the European fire safety agenda for the next two years. Elie thanked all participants for the very fruitful discussion, appreciating that the fire safety week effectively started with this roundtable.

End.

### **More information**

Quentin de Hulst,  
Executive Chair of Modern Building Alliance  
[quentin@modernbuildingalliance.eu](mailto:quentin@modernbuildingalliance.eu)