

Still all to play for

With so many questions unanswered regarding sulphur emission regulation changes and final talks over EU trailer lengths still to come, ECG president **Costantino Baldissara** calls for action and engagement from everyone with a vested interest



“ **A**s we head into the final quarter of 2014, you might be reflecting on what a surprising year it's been so far. The mood of our members has generally been brighter this year, despite continued unrest in Ukraine and the Middle East. We have seen this consistently reflected in the quarterly ECG Confidence & Cost Trends Survey we conduct. However, the challenges facing us do not grow any smaller.

The next few months again bring political and legislative issues to the fore. For once, I will not start with our most prominent campaign on loaded truck lengths, as I wish to draw your attention to the looming operational deadline of January 1, 2015, when the Sulphur Emission Control Areas (SECAs) that encompass the English Channel, North Sea and Baltic Sea take effect. From then, maritime fuel used in this zone will be restricted to 0.1% sulphur content or equivalent (similar SECAs come into force along the US and Canadian coast lines as well).

Even now, so close to this deadline, there are many unknowns. For example, how will the new rules be enforced by member states? Will the supply of low-sulphur fuel be sufficient, as it is essentially the same diesel you put in your trucks and cars? Will the exhaust 'scrubbers' that several shipping lines have invested in be robust and reliable enough? Will the necessary infrastructure for the supply of liquifying natural gas across the SECAs be put in place to support investment in this technology going forward?

While nobody has the answers for now, we are making sure our ECG representatives within the European Commission's European Sustainable Shipping Forum remain closely involved and informed.

It's critical for regulators to understand the significant cost increases of any and all of these solutions, which could affect the design of networks in northern Europe. One feared impact is a modal shift away from short-sea shipping. Anyone operating in these areas is waiting to see what happens.

The ECG is also in the early stages of a legislative initiative that relates to the EU's Combined Transport Directive, which is effectively a policy to encourage the use of rail and waterborne transport for freight by allowing fiscal and financial incentives at national levels. The movement of new vehicles has not, until now, been covered by the definition of 'load units' within the Combined Transport Directive

– a situation ECG would like to see changed so our sector can take advantage of potential benefits in future. To this effect, we have participated in a public consultation as well as a stakeholder working group organised by the European Commission as part of an internal review. So far, at least, we have received a sympathetic hearing. Considering that vehicle logistics is already such a multimodal industry, we think it is only fair to include it in a revised definition of the directive.

Entering the last mile

Of course, as regular readers of this column will know, harmonisation of the loaded length of car transporters remains top of ECG's priority list for lobbying activities at the EU level. This particular journey could end in the next few months, maybe even before the end of 2014. That would be the last mile in what has been a very long journey. Were it not for the political upheaval in Brussels this year following the parliamentary elections and the ensuing changes at the head of the Commission, it could have been over already.

This last phase consists of 'trialogue' negotiations – three-way talks between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of (Transport) Ministers.

Although we have been successful so far in gaining support for our cause, we have to push to the very end to avoid our objective being sacrificed during these negotiations. As such, we are continuing to lobby the national representatives who influence the views of the Council, as well as encouraging our members to take up the case with their national transport ministries.

The reality is that we will not know until the end if we have succeeded, but we must continue to lobby and enlist the support of everyone we can to maximise our chances. As I have asked before on these pages, if you have a vested interest in obtaining an EU-wide harmonisation to 20.75 metres and feel able to support our lobbying campaign, please contact the ECG Secretariat as soon as possible and they will let you know how best you can help.

ECG is currently active across all transport modes in support of the industry and our members. All of these subjects and more will be covered during the ECG Conference in Amsterdam on October 16-17. The whole industry will be at the event, and I look forward to seeing you there too. (Full details at www.ecgconference.org) ▶