

# EUROPEAN AGENDAS



Dr Scott Steedman © Civix

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competition and pressure to reduce their impact on the environment. Other segments such as construction, quaintly described as more 'traditional' industries, are criticised for their waste production, poor safety record and lack of client focus.

The Commission has worked hard over this period to transform its own relationships with industry, to foster dialogue within fragmented sectors and between diverse markets across the continent. Member states have been encouraged to participate in the discussion, so that a structured approach to innovation in industry can be achieved. In its communication to the Spring 2005 European Council, the European Commission reaffirmed the goals set out for Europe in previous summits:

- the creation of a dynamic and competitive European economy, within an overarching commitment to sustainable development
- the promotion of knowledge and innovation
- a high quality of life for all, with Europe being an attractive place in which to live and work.

These are lofty ambitions but the reality is that, on the ground, significant progress has been made to set the framework for industry transformation – and for FP7. This programme for innovation will be unlike any previous programme, with an integrated approach at European, member state and industry level towards innovation and the delivery of growth and high-quality

employment, in an increasingly competitive global market.

We must not forget that Europe has many extraordinary advantages over its global competitors. In the context of what has to be achieved by industry in the next 25 years, 'Europe is the only continent that can save the world!' as a senior Dutch industry figure put it to me recently.

Leading engineering organisations across Europe have woken up to their responsibilities in respect of society, the environment and the end-user. Some in the UK still maintain that this is a 'European' agenda, as if it were somehow irrelevant to our own UK situation, but in practice these issues are the key drivers that will underpin the future success of UK engineers and UK engineering.

For The Royal Academy of Engineering, the challenge is clear: we need to reach out on behalf of the engineering industry to the public at large, promoting our role in achieving quality of life, sustainability and industry competitiveness. We have raised our *visibility* but the next stage is to increase our *impact* with the public. As we hunt for a new building, we are right to search for one that is not only suitable for events but also for the public to visit – where we would be able to showcase our role and purpose in meeting the challenges of UK and European society. A glass box in Westminster, perhaps?

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It would be too easy to let the six month UK Presidency of the European Union pass by without comment. After all, there is little visible change that any individual Presidency can hope to achieve in any industry on such a scale as ours. However this is not to say that nothing is going on; far from it.

The last six months have seen frenetic activity behind the scenes as we move towards the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research and development. FP7 will be unlike any previous framework programme, embracing new instruments for innovation and seeking, for the first time, a truly industry-led strategic research agenda in the context of European, member state and societal interests. The ambition is to set in motion long-term programmes that will stimulate industry transformation through a mixture of incentive, coercion, and market pressure.

Why transform our industries? All segments of the engineering sector need to look long and hard at their own performance; some industries such as aerospace are highly organised but face stiff international