



8th World Surfactant Congress – Review on a Promising Relaunch

June 6th – 8th, 2011, Vienna, Austria



■ Introduction

Almost a thousand delegates from the »Surfactant Value Chain« and representatives from science met again at the »8th World Surfactant Congress and Business Convention« of the European surfactants association CESIO (Comité Européen des Agents de Surface et de leurs Intermédiaires), which was held in Vienna for the first time.

The World Surfactant Congress has a long tradition. It was first launched in Munich in 1984, and until 2008 was organised alternately every four years by the major national member associations of the CESIO from Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain. After the Congress in 2008 in Paris, the decision was taken that in future the Congress would be organised by CESIO itself and that it would be held at shorter intervals. The restructuring was inevitable, because the European surfactant industry had changed considerably during the preceding twenty years: The ongoing consolidation process in the sector had, amongst other things, resulted in formerly strong national surfactant associ-

ations such as GOSIP in Great Britain, ASPA in France or AEPSAT in Spain no longer being in a position, due to lower membership numbers, to host a congress of this size. In addition, the main sponsors, who had to have a presence at several events of similar nature, were requesting a change of direction, since a purely scientifically-technically oriented Congress in the current form was no longer financially viable.

■ Realignment: Scientific Exchange and Business

The CESIO World Surfactant Congress was previously considered by participants from the surfactant and detergent industry to be principally a platform for scientific and technical exchanges. The 2011 Congress in Vienna was for the first time to provide not only a platform in the form of a Business Convention for business exchange between surfactant manufacturers, their suppliers and customers, in which they can learn about developments and exchange surfactant-related news, but in addition an appro-

priate environment for business meetings. The member organisations do not consider the CESIO Congress to be competition to other events such as the Conference taking place every four years in Montreux or the ACI congress, which opens its doors every year in Florida. The reason for this is that detergents are not the only focus of interest, the wider implications of surfactants, particularly in technical areas, are also covered. Although household detergents and cleaning agents comprise around 50 percent of surfactant applications, other areas of application for surfactants are in agrochemistry, construction chemicals, cosmetics, the paint and coating industry and in oil production.

Also, through co-operation with the European Association of Chemical Distributors (FECC), the chemical distributors could for the first time be involved in the congress as a key partner of the surfactant industry.

The prelude to this re-launch took place in early June 2011 with the 8th CESIO World Surfactant Congress in Vienna. It is now planned to organise the Congress every two years together with the Busi-

ness Convention to accommodate the requirements of the business enterprises.

■ Sustainability and Product Innovation

With the congressional motto »Sustainability of the Surfactant Industry in a highly regulated world« the organisers recognised the long held claim of the surfactant industry of moving to implement appropriate product innovations. As always, and perhaps even more so today, sustainability as an integrated and holistic model for economic growth, considering concurrently the interests of the environment and society, represents a challenge for the chemical industry. This applies particularly when looking at the constraints within which companies have to implement their sustainability concepts, in a world which is increasingly shaped by domestic, European and international regulations.

For many decades the surfactant industry has to comply with more and more legal requirements, which although having the goal of sustainability, also significantly restrict the scope for action and the flexibility of the industry. A central message of the Congress was, therefore, that to pursue the goal of overall sustainability it was necessary to have sustainable manufacturing processes in addition to sustainable products.

The surfactant industry offers solutions in both areas to help, especially in increasing the efficiency of surfactant systems in their specific fields of application and also encouraging or even enabling direct contributions of downstream sectors towards future sustainable development.

■ Key Issues and Ideas for Future Development

A theme that reoccurred in many presentations at the Congress was the improved performance of surfactant systems with emphasis on the interaction between the surfactant used and other product components. As a practical example of this we can cite laundry washing at low temperatures, where surfac-

tants can make a significant contribution to saving water and energy and thus making it a more sustainable activity.

Other key topics were natural raw materials and nano-materials. The latter represent a decisive driving force for the development of new surfactants through their increased use. The manufacture of nano-particles with special properties for a specific use requires a suitable adjustment of the surfactant structure. Similarly, with polymerizable surfactants the size and the geometry of the nano-particles and also their surface properties can be modified selectively.

Even the production and processing of new raw materials trigger corresponding developments in the area of surfactants. Polymers with special micro-fibre structure, biomimetic materials and composite materials require surfactants that help to optimize the compatibility of different components with each other. This is where the classic property of surfactants, its boundary surface activity, comes into play which enables the connection of specific systems with each other.

An example of the popularity of this subject was the presentation in one of the parallel events on the theme of »Persistent foam control«. This was a major attraction, drawing nearly 200 attendees who wanted to learn about sustainable solutions for the fast destruction of foam.

»Foam« and »foam elimination« play a role in many different and often highly complex I&I-applications; one thinks, for example, of the automatic car wash or industrial bottle washing. While in some applications foam, as an indicator for the cleaning process, is desirable, it is not in others. This is the case in many industrial applications where it must be avoided or reduced to a minimum. There are many possibilities for the elimination of foam and accordingly numerous products at the market. The decisive criteria are therefore the speed and efficiency of the cleaning process. The examples presented here show how tailor-made properties contribute to sustainability, by reducing the quantity of cleaning surfactants used through their improved efficiency.

■ The Congress: Result Findings and Lessons Learnt

The Congress was attended by business and marketing managers, product managers, application specialists, R & D and HSE experts from European, American and Asian firms as well as numerous representatives of academic and research institutions from around the world.

Among the nearly 1 000 participants were more than 70 speakers from surfactant manufacturing companies and their cus-



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tomers, research institutions and associations who gave presentations in the four super-ordinate sessions »Market Trends«, »Applications«, »Technical Topics« and »Safety and Regulatory Affairs«. The presentations on »Safety and Regulatory Affairs« were noticeably less well attended than at the congresses in 2004 in Berlin and in 2008 in Paris. This was probably due to the fact that in 2004 the topic »Detergents Regulation« dominated the discussions and activities within the HSE and in 2008 it was the European chemicals regulation REACH that motivated many interested parties to participate. Very good attendance was recorded at the talks to »Market Trends« and »Applications« which is certainly due to the fact that, when compared to the previous events, business interests were more strongly represented. A post-conference online survey of congress visitors was carried out and by the beginning of August more than 100 replies had been received. This showed that overall the presentations viewed to be better than those in Paris in 2008 and that the assessment of the field of »market trends« was once again above average. The organisers take this as a clear indication that the restructuring of the event was the right decision and that the interaction of business-oriented presentations and the Business Convention can be considered as an important target-oriented and contouring element.

CESIO President Dr. *Thomas Greindl* welcomed the present participants on the first day of the Congress and invited them to join the panel discussions on the topics of »Ecofootprinting and Carbon Footprint« and »Chemical Mixtures – Combination Effects of Chemicals« that were to follow in the afternoon. Even here, the visitors' numbers were encouraging, about evenly distributed between the two parallel events and with predominantly very positive reviews, which showed clearly that dealing with new topics in the form of moderated panel discussions is a promising option. Monday afternoon ended with a talk by futurist *Matthias Horx* who presented the audience with a deep insight into the mega trends and markets of the future in a very vivid way. The blend of science, vision and entertainment will remain



long in the participants' memory: The organisers have raised the bar high for future plenary speakers.

On Tuesday congress visitors could select from the four concurrent sessions those topics which were of particular interest to them. Although, compared to Paris in 2008, the number of parallel events was already significantly reduced; some participants however still considered that they were spoilt for choice with the four series of talks offered. The organisers therefore intend in future to offer only three parallel sessions with the topics »Business and Market Trends«, »Technical & Applications« and »Safety and Regulatory«, on the assumption that the overlapping of the interests of the participants will be further minimised.

On the evening of the second day of the congress, the participants of the event also had the opportunity to participate in the gala dinner in the Festival Hall of the Vienna City Hall. Here, the initiator of the World Future Council and founder of the »Alternative Nobel Prize«, *Jakob von Uexküll*, gave the after-dinner speech. It was shown by the post-conference survey that such social events with a table dinner are in high demand. In addition, the large number of representatives from business, who generally preferred dining with clients in small groups and more intimate surroundings met in the Festival Hall of the Vienna City Hall. Wednesday morning again offered the

opportunity to either hold talks or obtain more information, either through presentations or poster sessions, then in the early afternoon the eighth CESIO World Surfactant Congress ended with the »Closing Ceremony«; at this ceremony, the CESIO award was presented to *Jan Rosenblom*, formerly Akzo Nobel, who was honoured for his longstanding service and significant contribution to the surfactant industry. In future prizes for the best talks and posters will again be awarded.



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■ The Business Convention: The Direction is Right

Out of the nearly 40 exhibitors, about half of the enterprises had booked one or more hospitality suites in order to hold business meetings with customers, suppliers or competitors. These took place consecutively with the presentations, from Monday afternoon through to Wednesday morning. The principal sponsors were able to use free-of-charge daily tickets, which they issued to their business partners. This enabled these 120 invited visitors to be welcomed throughout the entire period and to receive free access to the exhibition, but not to the presentations. The potential of the free-of-charge tickets, however, was even greater. It may be that in many cases it was not possible for the customers to attend the event due to time overlaps with others, and obviously some sponsors did not exploit the full possibilities of the tickets. The aim of future CESIO events will be to achieve a balance between the registered participants primarily interested in the presentations and panel discussions, and those who come to the event exclusively for the Business Convention. Although the sponsors were on average satisfied with the business meetings, especially as the volume of customers was much higher than in the previous congresses, they would have still liked to have met for discussion with more customers and other (potential) business partners. This was confirmed by the results of the post-conference survey of participants: In the near future there will be consideration given to defining the dual profile of the next CESIO congresses – a scientific-technically oriented congress coupled with a Business Convention – to further develop existing and to provide additional benefits for participants, especially in the field of customer relations. Amongst the things to be considered are to identify priorities in the field of applications and to offer



Jan Rosenblom, CESIO Award Winner (left), and Dr. Thomas Greindl, President CESIO

relevant presentations, customer symposia and similar activities; as well as to cooperate more closely with essential downstream industrial organisations in the planning.

The opinions received during and after the event, taken as a whole, give rise to further work on restructuring. Although there are new events being offered in the U.S. and Asia, the CESIO has the advantage that the European surfactant industry itself acts as organiser and thus has the design of the programme and structuring of the event in its own hands. CESIO acts as a European Association operating within the borders of Europe. CESIO cannot easily operate at a local level in the dynamic economic regions; however, CESIO can provide attractive offers within Europe for producers from other regions as well as multinationals. One can certainly send signals and create a kind of geographical proximity with the choice of venue; therefore offering European congress locations such as Barcelona or Istanbul to some extent give an opening to South America and the Near and Middle East – both extremely attractive regions from the perspective of the surfactant industry.

■ Outlook

The CESIO World Surfactant Congress 2011 has, with its new adjustments, taken a first step towards being a contemporary, interesting and profitable event for representatives from the technical divisions and leaders of business alike. With its relaunch, the World Surfactant Congress is set, in the years ahead, to both continue the tradition of the earlier congresses and also form an interface for the exchange of surfactant manufacture industry with science and the legislative authorities. In addition, there shall be better opportunities for business meetings to provide a forum that covers all aspects of the entire surfactant industry and therefore close the current gaps between Western and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

■ CESIO World Surfactant Congress 2013: June 10 – 12 Barcelona, Spain

The CESIO Congress will raise its profile in the next few years and find a firmly established place between ACI, HPCI, ICIS, Montreux and SEPAWA. It will be the task of its leaders to establish its position as an independent, valuable and useful addition. The opportunity will present itself just in two years: The next CESIO World Surfactant Congress is taking place in Barcelona from 10 to 12 June 2013.

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