

## **Panel of experts on resources and reserves – minerals and their sustainable use**

### **Report on one-day workshop held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011 in Brussels entitled “Raw Materials in a Modern Society”**

***Andy Bowden***

The basis for the meeting was the realisation that the EU needs to improve the security of supply of non-energy, non-agricultural raw materials. These include aggregates, industrial minerals and metals, particularly those used in high technology industries, such as cobalt, platinum, rare earths and titanium. I understand the realisation that the EU is over dependant on imported raw materials was triggered by the decision of the Chinese government not to export rare earth metals. The aim is to greatly improve the supply by 2020.

I think we can all agree with this and the above paragraph is based on the first paragraph of a ‘non-paper’ or discussion paper produced before the meeting. However, from that point on the discussion paper defies logic. It proposes that the scarcity of these raw materials can be rectified by ‘increased resource efficiency’ and ‘new European recycling activities’. The non-paper, which is 6 pages long, never mentions exploration for, and discovery of, these raw materials.

As you may be aware the EFG Expert Panel Minerals put together a submission pointing out this and the long term need to encourage exploration. On the suggestion of Pim Demecheleer I took a large bundle of these to the meeting in Brussels.

The meeting began with a series of talks by a series of EU civil servants describing themselves, their role and the need for raw materials. The general message was that Europe is being out paced in production and is not as innovative as the USA and we must create a framework that increase efficiency of production from existing mining projects, encourage re-cycling and find substitutes. Again the word exploration was not mentioned.

The next phase of the meeting consisted of four guest speakers. Three of whom were quite critical of the structure and direction of the workshop. Of these the most interesting was Par Weihed of the University of Lulea Sweden. He gave an excellent talk pointing out that the only way that the raw materials required by a modern society can be obtained in the required quantity is by exploration, discovery and mining and if the EU did not wish to be totally dependant on outside sources it would have to encourage exploration. He gave Swedish examples of successful exploration and of further potential.

Another speaker who re-iterated this need although less stridently was Luis Placido Martins (Ministry of Economy and Innovation, Portugal). He pointed out the importance of Neves Corvo to the Portuguese economy and to the European economy in that without Neves Corvo copper would have to be added to the list of scarce European metals. He also was very pleased at the recent success of exploration in the vicinity of Neves Corvo.

In late morning we split into 5 parallel sessions. I attended the session entitled "Improving Europe's raw materials knowledge and infrastructure base" – *"Building an innovative knowledge base of European resources, including exploration of primary and secondary raw materials (on land and in the marine environment) and estimations of the resource including urban mines"* It was chaired by Maria Spiliopoulou.

I think this was the most popular of the sessions and was attended by about 40 people. The arguments put forward were well put but those of us proposing encouragement of exploration were largely ignored. It was most interesting that the people who saw exploration as the way forward were all from countries where it already takes place, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. However, the only thing on which consensus could be agreed on was the production of a resource map for Europe.

For the final session of the afternoon we all went back to main lecture theatre and heard the reports from all the groups. It was clear from this that the discussions in the other sessions were quite bland all agreeing on the need for innovation, more recycling, more international co-operation, and more sustainability.

A report on the meeting was promised and it was said that a further meeting would take place but although I am on the circulation list I have not heard anything more.

My opinion is that the EU have woken up to Europe's raw material vulnerability but do not have the will to truly tackle it. They want to defend the nimby approach but just need to be able say that they are reviewing the situation. The experience was extremely interesting but ultimately quite depressing.