

PRESS RELEASE

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the European Leather Association

At a time when European citizens were reflecting on their vote and who will be sitting in the next European Parliament, COTANCE member associations and their tanners gathered to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of their common representative body. They chose for this Paris where COTANCE was born and the Auditorium of the Académie de l'Agriculture de France for the open session of the Assembly General.

COTANCE, created in 1969 in Paris, has been representing the leather industry and its interests at European and international level over the last 50 years. This celebration, besides being a moment of festivity, has been an occasion to pause and reflect over this fifty-year journey, and at the same time, to look into the future of the European leather industry. "**European Leather for the Future**" was indeed the leading thread of the event's interventions: from the welcoming speeches held by **Jérôme Verdier**, President of Tannerie ALRAN SAS and President of FFTM (Fédération Française de la Tannerie Mégisserie - French Federation of Tanners) and by Andreas Kindermann, current COTANCE President from Wollsdorf Leather (Austria), passing through the European and international institutional views of Anna Athanasopoulou from DG Grow at European Commission and Maria Teresa Pisani from the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division at UNECE, and last but not least with the perspective of a luxury brand by Chiara Morelli (Group Operations Sustainability Manager at Kering).

"COTANCE serves as a shield", asserted COTANCE **President Andreas Kindermann**. "In all these years which have passed, we have seen many successes also some failures, highs and lows, times of booming business and times of crisis... But the European leather industry is resilient. It never 'gave up' and cooperation was decisive!".

Anna Athanasopoulou reminded the audience how "sustainability, smart investments, innovation, fair competition and skills are the main keywords in the current European policy for industry." These priorities are highly relevant for a robust EU leather industry to remain sustainable and globally competitive and continue holding a strategic position in the international markets. "The European Commission promotes different types of interventions in order to create a favourable environment for growth, as direct funding, instruments to stimulate investments in research, innovation, sustainability and skills, as well as new initiatives for the establishment of industrial clusters. In working together SMEs can be more innovative, create more jobs and register more international trademarks than they would alone."

Chiara Morelli, Kering Group Operations Sustainability Manager, shared in her keynote speech how collaboration among the different actors of the leather supply chain is key and at the core of Kering activities with suppliers. This approach can strengthen the industry's value and will enable tanners to strive for innovation and more sustainable processes. Besides working on the reduction of carbon emissions and use of hazardous substances, according to C. Morelli -, the leather industry should strengthen the cooperation with farms and slaughterhouses in terms of animal welfare with the final aim of improving the traceability of hides and skins and the transparency of the supply chain.

Enhancing Transparency and Traceability for Sustainable Textile and Leather Value Chains is emerging as a key priority to make the industry achieve more responsible production and consumption patterns, and it is indeed also the main objective of the UNECE UN/CEFACT project coordinated by **Maria Teresa Pisani**, and jointly implemented with the European Commission, ITC, ILO and key industry partners. This initiative aims at setting up a multi-stakeholder platform, and developing policy recommendations, global traceability standards and its implementation guidelines for sustainable textile and leather value chains.

Drawing the conclusions of the event, COTANCE President Kindermann, stressed how the importance of sustainability in the leather value chain was highlighted by each panellist. He emphasised that sustainability is a key priority of COTANCE, as it had been demonstrated with the setting at EU level the rules for calculating the environmental footprint of leather. He also pointed out that the European leather industry with its high standards is well positioned for the future and further improvements of the environmental performance of the European industry. "For the future of the leather industry, we aim at zero-waste if we want the tanning industry to be recognised as excelling in the circular economy".

The festivities continued with a private visit to the nearby Orsay Museum and a dinner in the Museum restaurant, where we welcomed a number of former COTANCE Presidents: Mr Nalle Johansson (Sweden), Mr Jean Claude Ricomard (France) and Mr Jonathan Muirhead (UK). Guests attending the event included distinguished representatives from UNIDO, Ivan Král and from the International Council of Tanners, Paul Person.