

# An Insider's Perspective : Holger Krahmer MEP

REACH was possibly the largest piece of legislation and the most hotly contested dossier in the living memory of the Environment Committee, if not the entire European Parliament. Debates across 11 different parliamentary committees saw thousand upon thousands of amendments from hundreds of different individual members. A plethora of industry and non-governmental organisations actively sought to influence this process, through the provision of technical information, the use of emotional arguments and in some cases outright scare tactics.

There were those of us who sought to strike the right balance between the need for a competitive industrial base in Europe and the protection of human health and the environment. In retrospect, we won some battles and lost others. We made good progress on making registration more workable, reducing data requirements for low tonnages, but perhaps lost ground in the fight for a completely risk based approach to substances of high concern. The final legislative text that emerged late in 2006 is a complex web of provisions that will take some time for all those concerned to untangle. However, we can at least take comfort from the fact that throughout the text the use of scientific information and risk assessment to make informed decisions about the management of chemicals is now laid down in law. Producers, such as the members of ECPI, which already have large amounts of data about substances and their uses, should remain optimistic for the future under REACH.

Reflecting upon this, I take away three key lessons. Firstly, as Parliamentarians we rely on the outside world to provide us with an insight on the technical subjects that we deal with on a daily basis. In the last legislature, the environment committee alone faced 266 legislative dossiers during its five year term, most of them on very technical subjects. Secondly, despite a wide range of information



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1185	Amendments proposed in Environment Committee to European Commission's REACH proposal
5	Members of European Parliament Environment Committee with a background in chemistry

many of my colleagues still choose to follow their political instincts. Many of them refuse even to bow to the European Union's own scientific advice on dossiers that relate to chemicals. Finally, we are still all politicians. There is always need to weigh up what it is possible to achieve and the balance that has to be struck between competing interests. This after all is the vocation to which we were elected.

There are those who will say that the fact that no-one appears happy with the final REACH text illustrates that the political balance that has been struck is right. Looking forward, the more

pressing question is whether that balance is workable in practice. While the implementation of REACH should be manageable for larger companies, the process is likely to be more challenging for small and medium enterprises and manufacturers of specialty chemicals. As a Parliament, we increasingly have to re-examine the impact of the legislation we adopt and the Environment Committee holds regular sessions on the implementation of legislation to bring issues to the attention of the Commission. As REACH implementation gathers speed, I trust that industry will continue to provide valuable insights to all Parliamentarians about its effects, intended or otherwise. ■

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