

Interview with Mrs. Sigrid de Vries, CLEPA's Secretary General

Sigrid de Vries is the Secretary General of the European Association of Automotive Suppliers (CLEPA), which brings together the 100 of the world's most prominent suppliers for car parts, systems and modules and more than 20 national trade associations and European sector associations.

The automotive industry is rapidly changing with technology. What do you see as the main challenges/opportunities for your members? What can/should be the role of the European Union in this context?

Automotive suppliers are by default used to adapting to change and new trends, and often stand at the cradle of new innovations and applications. But the industry is currently facing its biggest transformation in over a hundred years. This is both posing risks and challenges.

Our vision is that the future of mobility is safe, sustainable, smart and competitive. We need to limit the environmental impact of the transport of people and goods, we must prevent casualties on the roads and we will change the face of mobility with connectivity and autonomous driving features. These major priorities translate into substantial investment and cannot be achieved without being competitive and operating in a competitive, supportive policy environment where many actors work together.

Mobility forms an essential aspect of our lives and the formidable transformation currently underway is only possible with concerted effort and a coherent ecosystem. The automotive supply industry is delivering on its vision with clean, smart and safe technology solutions, but Europe is currently lacking a robust infrastructure for renewable energy, digital communication and mobility services. We ask that EU leaders coordinate their actions and deliver a supportive policy framework that fosters innovation, supports European technology leadership and ensures that a future-oriented and skilled workforce is available.

It is often said that closer cooperation between education providers and industry on a skills agenda is necessary. From CLEPA's perspective, what can be done in order to strengthen this cooperation?

European automotive suppliers support vocational training and lifelong learning programs working closely with universities and other institutions, enabling the constant adaptation of the workforce to changing business models and trends. The automotive sector is in need of critical skill-sets in the fields of automation, robotics, cyber-security, and software and hardware integration.

Among the best examples of cooperation are those that cater for effective information exchange, building solid communication networks between industry players and learning providers. Conversational digital platforms or the interactive events can lead to a successful exchange of information and views and help identify the needs from local industry partners in terms of education and training.

The DRIVES Project is of course a great example of how European institutions and industry can collaborate towards closing the pronounced gap between the available skills in our sector and those that are required in response to the introduction of new technologies and automation.

The automotive sector is being influenced by such a broad set of changes, from climate change, to changes in the way people use the car, to the entrance of new players in the market. What concrete measures is the industry adopting in order to be prepared?

The automotive supply industry is in the driver's seat when it comes to shaping the future of mobility. Suppliers continue investing heavily in alternative drivetrains, such as hybrid, electric and fuel-cell solutions. Taking into account the changing needs of the customer, they introduce innovative multimodal and autonomous mobility concepts that increase accessibility and comfort. The potential of vehicle connectivity and automation is huge and spans from artificial-intelligence- and sensor-powered safety to sophisticated driving-assistance systems, to name just a few. Connectivity also opens a whole new world of shared business models that offer market opportunities for suppliers and can position Europe at the forefront of sustainable and diverse mobility services.

Apart from sustaining considerable investments in research and development, automotive suppliers are collaborating with vehicle manufacturers and regulatory bodies to establish a more efficient traffic and transportation infrastructure and will continue working closely with energy providers to improve efficiency and alternative fuel options, as well as promote the much-needed infrastructure.

The deep collaboration between the major players in our sector, the Tier 1 and 2 suppliers, and the rest of the value chain, including SMEs and start-ups, supports the flexibility and adaptability of the sector. It is essential that a revitalised, comprehensive European industrial policy takes all these elements into account.

The overall attractiveness of the sector to its employees of the future is a key requirement to guarantee its sustainability, ensuring that a generation of committed, skilled and talented people shape and deliver on societal demands. Therefore we underline the importance of programmes such as DRIVES as an excellent platform to prepare today's minds for the mobility of tomorrow.

What are the 2-3 songs you must have in a long car journey?

Sting – Message in a bottle

Youssou N'Dour & Neneh Cherry – 7 seconds

The Beatles – Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band