On a national and international basis the German metal trade is facing challenges which influence its daily work and internal processes as well as put the worldwide trade network in problematic situations. The purpose of the media work of the association is to openly address this situation in order to be heard and find solutions together with political institutions. Hence most recently VDM board member Murat Bayram commented on the topics “American customs policy” and “global material flows” in the ZDF heute journal with more than three million spectators and two weeks later in the ZDF Mittagsmagazin with 800,000 spectators.

Traditionally Russia is an important partner for the metal trade in Germany and Austria. Apart from all political discussions, numerous contacts exist between producers, traders and recyclers of these countries. Hence the executive director of the Russian metal trade association Rusmet, Victor V. Kovshevny, and his German colleague Ralf Schmitz used the occasion of the BIR conference to talk about topics focusing on trade policy. Rusmet has also been a member of the European recycling association EuRIC since the beginning of 2018.

Next VDM networking meetings:
> 6th of December 2018 Munich
> 17th of January 2019: Aachen together with Coberec, BDSV, MRF
> 28th of March 2019: Leipzig together with IGMNiR
> 16th of May: Rostock-Warnemünde General Assembly
> 6th of June 2019: Cologne
> 27th of June 2019: Freiburg together with VSMR
> 5th of September 2019: Hamburg
> December 2019: Munich
> 23th of April 2020: Berlin General Assembly

For more information please ask the VDM office: wien@vdm.berlin
The RECYCLING magazine talked to VDM President Petra Zieringer about childhood dreams, her plans for the VDM and the importance of the industry for Germany among other things.

Mrs. Zieringer, why did you make yourself available for the position of the president of the association?

I’ve always said: Having a job is a vocation. When I assume an office, no matter where, then I want to make a difference in society. It’s a natural consequence that I will try that in a position in which I have the necessary authority to make a difference. Of course this involves responsibility, but a toothless tiger can’t bite. Even as a child, I already dreamed of taking on a responsible position. I was only surprised at the timing, I rather thought it would happen further down the line.

You are not the first woman at the top of the association – do you think the VDM is more progressive than the rest of the industry in this respect?

We are characterised by the middle-class and family businesses. There are only a few big companies and a lot of family businesses. Of course there are also women. And the women who manage companies in our industry have also frequently ended up on the management board because they pursue their profession actively and with passion.

What are you plans and ideas for further developing the VDM?

I’m pleased about a really well functioning association, this applies to the administrative office as well as the management board, they’ve just done a great job. Generally the individual, the person behind the transactions, is important to me. For me members aren’t some numbers or figures, but people who work together, who share values or they don’t, and this is what I will concentrate my work on.

For example this could mean to support the next generation and advance the metal academy. It definitely means to help small and medium-sized companies to implement all the EU laws, which every small business is overburdened with. But it’s also important that we have nice celebrations like most recently in Vienna. I want everyone to be doing well.

You say that you want to make sure that everyone is doing well. How are the businesses of the industry faring economically at the moment? How do you rate the situation?

In the past we were only an association for metal traders, now recyclers and producers belong to the VDM as well. These are completely different areas and therefore the association has an incredible heterogenous structure. For this reason, it is always difficult to say how everyone is doing. Nevertheless one can say that the current situation is positive for everyone, everyone is exceeding their expectations. At the moment good money is being made in each area because the really big developments that are happening have to do with metals: It doesn’t matter whether you develop a new car, export machines or set up windmills: Everything contains non-ferrous metals.

The fluctuating prices are also a good thing, irrespective of the political decisions that caused them. Because the worst thing that can happen to a metal trader are stagnating prices. The prices have to keep moving and we have that with all metals to a certain degree.

You’ve already shortly mentioned the global political situation, which by now is characterised by its extreme instability. How does this affect the industry?

The metal trade is always fluctuating because every political movement has an effect on the prices. But you’re right: It becomes faster and more shortlived and the risk with making decisions gets bigger.

Let’s take the example of the Chinese market: Certain scrap can only be exported to China containing minimal impurity, but up till now 80 to 90 per cent of cables in Germany were exported. What happens now? What will the metal...
traders in Germany do? At the moment heaps of cables are building up because the few cable dismantlers in Germany can’t take care of the additional amounts. Now I have to think about whether to build up new capacities. A new machine costs 1M euro.

But should I invest now just because China closes its borders? It could be that it remains this way for the next 30 years, then this investment would be a good idea. But what happens if in a year China realises that it needs more copper and imports cables again? That’s what I mean with variability: Can you still make decisions in this environment which have long-term consequences for your company? And we’re talking about the middle class here, where the machines have to be worked to their full capacity. This variability leads to greater risks and investment decisions which are not made so easily anymore. And I’m asking myself the question whether the middle class can cope with this in the long run.

About which topics would you expect some more impulses or support from Berlin or Brussels?

I would like less impulses for our industry. To me it seems that politics only concern themselves with our area, I would like to change that. It is important to me that attention is being paid to the environment; what is a problem, however, is that metals have slipped into the waste sector. And waste treatment facilities are affected by every regulation. I would like for some rethinking to happen: It is alright that our companies are waste treatment facilities, but the focus should be on the fact that we are raw-material suppliers. And these raw-materials are important goods for Germany. If one then considers the unstable global political situation, we would do well to look out for raw-material suppliers. And in Germany those are metal traders, recyclers and producers – and if possible those should be given support. If you constantly make life more difficult for them with stricter regulations, then eventually it won’t be possible anymore to process metals in Germany.

One has to imagine the consequences: It is cheaper to dismantle cables in Germany than to dig the copper out of the earth in Chile. And it is eco-friendlier to dismantle cables in Germany with our high standards than to have them burned somewhere abroad. I would also like for the implementation of the legal requirements of the EU to become a bit fairer. What use does the whole legislation have when seemingly no country except Germany follows it?

At the moment I also sense a certain hostility in Germany towards the industry. But we can’t completely do without industry, it is our strength after all. One has to make some compromises some time, but at the moment these compromises are very one-sided.

Digitisation is one of the most important topics at the moment. What is its importance for the industry? What can the VDM provide in this respect?

Because of the aforementioned heterogenous structure of the association, it is difficult to develop a higher-level position. We consider the topic to be at its beginning and therefore established a work group which observes the market and keeps an eye on the technical innovations as well as the basic structural changes which digitisation entails. We’re gladly going to put forth this knowledge and be available as an intermediary, but in the end we as an association still have to find our position and see what we as well as the businesses still have to implement.

Saying goodbye to first graduation class

The first class of the VDM degree program “business economist metal trade VDM” received their graduation certificate in Karlsruhe at the end of June. The five junior metal traders were the first to complete the qualification, which the VDM customised to the line of business and its needs. We congratulate Martin Sonnenberg, Gregory Buchheit, Markus Mühlbauer, Michael Wachtmann und Jan Hendrik Pauling.
Chemicals legislation will influence waste legislation

by Ewelina Bugajski
VDM Division Manager
Environment & Recycling

A new development in the area of waste legislation has already been accompanying the industry since 2017. The areas of waste legislation and product and chemicals legislation, which are being applied independently from each other, always influence each other and generate an interaction. This development is problematic and is observed by us with a critical eye. The European Commission also deals with this issue by observing overlaps between chemicals, product and waste legislation and discussing possible methods of resolution.

As a result of the influence of the chemicals legislation, it is possible that in the waste legislation certain scrap will be classified as hazardous waste. This classification would then possibly result in the companies requiring completely new operating licences. This would not only make trade and recycling more difficult, but prevent it altogether. At the moment especially the metals cobalt, lead and copper are being discussed.

With cobalt, the discussion circles around the introduction of limit values in the chemicals legislation as well as the determination of a test method for the classification of cobalt. Buyers will pay attention to only buy materials in the future which do not exceed the cobalt limit values. There is also the risk that the limit values will be adopted by the waste legislation in the medium term. As a result affected scrap would then be classified as hazardous waste.

Lead has already been classified as an SVHC (substance of very high concern) in the chemicals legislation a few weeks ago. A consequence of this classification are information requirements. For lead as a substance and a composite (alloys are composites) the updating of safety data sheets applies when the limit value of 0,3 percent by weight is exceeded. For products which contain 0,1 percent by weight or more of lead, information requirements are in place for the buyer. The discussion about this topic is not yet finished. Further developments remain to be seen.

With copper, in the chemicals legislation copper granulate was supposed to be classified as harmful to one’s health and the environment – regardless of its size – just as a result of a wrong definition. Such generalisations can have devastating consequences for the handling of copper or other metals. The socio-economic consequences of a negative classification are extensive even beyond the industry.

200 metal traders attend VDM meeting in Hamburg

In mid-September about 200 metal traders attended the VDM meeting in Hamburg, one of six regional meetings the VDM organises every year. This year between 130 and 700 traders came together at the different locations to discuss the current situation of the global markets.