

# 'We can look forward to more ground-breaking ceremonies'

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Dr. Christof Günther, CEO of InfraLeuna GmbH, has been the spokesman of the chemical parks network since the start of this year. Günther was born in Saalfeld (Saale) in 1969 and studied electrical engineering and business economics at universities in Illmenau (Thuringia), Illinois (USA) and Delft (NL). After completing a stint at a major energy service provider, the father of four joined InfraLeuna in 2004. Find out what Dr. Günther has to say about the Central German Chemical Triangle's current situation in the following interview.

## As the spokesperson for CeChemNet, what do you consider to be your most important job?

**Günther:** When it comes to comparing net usage fees federally, the energy-intensive industries of Central Germany have been living with terrible cost disadvantages for years. Consequently, we are engaged in intense discussions with the state government about this extremely knotty issue. Seventy per cent of the overall electricity consumption in Saxony-Anhalt comes from renewable energy, making it the leader among German states. According to the plans set forth by the federal government, however, this rate is not expected to be met Germany-wide until 2040. This front-runner position has some drawbacks, as the net usage fees that accrue when purchasing energy in our state are especially high. Unfortunately, this puts our energy-intensive industries at a considerable disadvantage in terms of nation-wide competitiveness. We are confronted with significant costs when trying to acquire natural gas as well. Our state is home to giant tracts of agricultural land and produces a lot of biogas. As a result, the natural gas market of North-Eastern Germany became subject to an extremely high rate of contribution. While the rate of contribution is currently €0.75 per kWh/h in our region, it only comes out to €0.26 per kWh/h for the rest of Germany, almost a third of the cost. This disadvantage needs to be corrected via a nationwide rate adjustment.

## What services does CeChemNet offer investors?

**Günther:** Our main strength lies in our material network. Its potential is highly intriguing and is something we want to tap into together with the chemical companies on site. The TOTAL refinery is an essential partner as are Dow, Linde and the previously mentioned clients DOMO and Leuna-Harze.

Add to that a high level of public acceptance in the region. There is a level of sympathy for industry in the community that should not be taken for granted, especially in Germany. Furthermore, our collaboration with the authorities has been distinctly positive. As a consequence, we are able to react quickly to developments in the market as well as to the requests of our customers. All of these factors mean that the expansion we undertook of the logistics segment in years past has paid off. Increasingly, we also organise transports via the public railway system.

## According to various reports, companies are projecting declining levels of investment. Have you noticed this and, if so, how?

**Günther:** We have to be cognisant of the fact that Germany is not particularly attractive right now to clients who take a global perspective. Investors in the chemicals industry have their focus set more on the Arab World or on the United States. This is due partially to German energy policy, which burdens investors who have elevated energy demands with an incalculable risk. We need to get back to common sense and remain optimistic that a solution will be found. Leuna is strong as well as modern. We are among the most significant industrial sites, period. In Germany, we rank among the top five. We expect new investments this year and are looking forward to further ground-breaking ceremonies. ThyssenKrupp, for example, has invested more than €15m in a new plant which should go online before the close of the year.

## Why is Saxony-Anhalt an attractive business location, despite the fact that the basic conditions within the chemicals industry are so difficult?

**Günther:** I believe that stability in the chemicals sector and even growth – 2 per cent in the previous year – is an ace in the hole for Saxony-Anhalt. Magdeburg recognises the challenges that lay ahead, of which the revision of net usage fees is one example. Overcoming these challenges is something that we know interests the state government as well. We are still waiting on clear signals from Berlin, however, and are hoping for a turn toward industry-friendly policies which we feel is vital. In an era of intense global competition it is certainly not a matter of course that industry must flourish in Germany. We have to work hard every day to be in this position. It certainly helps to have stable and positive surroundings.

## How content are you with current developments, especially at a site as rich in tradition as Leuna?

**Günther:** The situation in 2012 was good, especially with the European debt crisis looming in the background. The volume of sales remained stable. Our clients have been able to sustain their positions despite the increasingly difficult business environment. Our sales revenue was around €320m. That figure is higher than it was in 2011. More than €200m were invested in the site to bring the LEUNA-Harze chlorine plant, the DOMO Caproleuna polymerisation plant and both of the newly constructed Fraunhofer Society and ThyssenKrupp Uhde plants online. More than anything, it is the entrepreneurial spirit of our long-standing clients that has advanced the park as a chemicals industry site.

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