

The worlds of business and research to meet in Milan to discuss gas-powered absorption heat pumps for domestic heating and environmental protection

Government and institutional representatives, research scientists and managers from top firms spoke at the international conference on the HEAT4U research project, including 15 of the largest players in the European energy, industry and research sectors, part of the Seventh Framework Program (FP7) promoted by the European Union

In today's world, the subject of alternative and renewable energy sources has become a daily topic of discussion. In this sense, gas absorption heat pump technology represents one of the most promising solutions, both for heating and producing hot water for domestic use.

The European Commission's recent support has confirmed the importance of HEAT4U, one of the most advanced international research projects in the field of climate change and energy efficiency that counts 15 of the top European firms – including six Italian firms – in the energy, industry and research sectors. The project, which has become part of the Seventh Framework Program for Research (FP7) promoted by the European Community, aims to apply gas absorption heat pump technology – currently used for heating residential, commercial, industrial and public administration buildings – in the residential sector. What is even more important is the goal of creating heat pumps that can be installed in existing residential buildings, which, according to recent studies carried out by the European Union, account for approximately 49% of the overall energy consumption in terms of primary energy and for 36% of greenhouse-gas emissions. Gas absorption heat pumps shall also be presented as a means for improving the heating efficiency of the existing residential building stock, which, by itself, accounts for over 60% of the built environment in Europe as a whole.

The subject was the focus of the international conference entitled "HEAT4U Project - Gas Absorption Heat Pump solution for existing residential buildings" held on 26 January this year at the Palazzo delle Stelline in Milan. The response of a particularly attentive audience and the importance of the speakers offered the best possible confirmation of the strategic and vital nature of the themes covered.

The conference was hosted, on behalf of the HEAT4U Consortium, by Maurizio Melis, Radio24 - Sole24Ore journalist and energy expert. After welcoming participants and introducing the conference theme, Mr.



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Melis handed the microphone to some important representatives from the institutional and industrial worlds, including Mauro Fabrizio Fasano, from the General Directorate for the Environment, Energy and Networks at the Regione Lombardia and Sebastiano Serra, Director of the Technical Department at the Ministry of the Environment, who offered a few short indications on future government policy regarding environmental protection and new supporting technology. Following Mr. Serra's speech, Alberto Grossi, Director of Consumers and Quality of Service Department at the Electricity and Gas Supervision Authority, Peter Schossig from the Fraunhofer Institute as a spokesperson for the International Energy Agency (IEA) and Uwe Glock, President of Bosch Thermotechnik all greeted the audience.

The conference then progressed to the informative part of the day, initiated by Luigi Tischer, Coordinator of the HEAT4U Project, who explained the details of the project itself within the context of the European Union's Seventh Framework Program for Research and Development, its aims and possible practical impact in all European countries. Mr. Tischer was followed by Marco Guerra, Expert in the Absorption Technology, who illustrated the state of the art technology used in the gas absorption heat pump and its potential.

In fact, more than 6,000 absorption heat pumps are already installed in the light commercial sector all over Europe, saving 9,600 tonnes of oil every year and avoiding the emission of more than 25,000 tonnes of CO₂. This is the equivalent of the amount of CO₂ absorbed by more than 3.5 million trees. In other words, when absorption heat pumps will be used in residential buildings each family will be able to avoid the emission of the same amount of CO₂ as produced by their car.

Once the first round of speeches was concluded, a Round Table was opened to discuss the theme of *Energy sustainability and integration of renewable energies in the residential heating sector*, moderated by Thomas Nowak, Secretary General of the European Heat Pumps Association (EHPA). Jvan Benzoni, Director of Research and Development at Robur, Paolo Pininfarina, President of Pininfarina and Henrik Siegle, Vice President of Bosch Thermotechnik also took part in the round table. In particular, Mr. Benzoni illustrated the steps to be taken before the technology can be introduced on the residential market. Mr. Siegle added that the technology has all the necessary features to be particularly suited to small sized residential buildings, but in order to achieve the success we hope for it must receive support from regulations in order to encourage the entry of complete and integrated solutions on the market.

The discussion and debate carried on into the second part of the day, during which two more Round Table sessions were held.

In the first one, Wolfram Sparber, Director of the EURAC Training and Research Institute, moderated the theme *HEAT4U: Research opportunities for Europe* presented by Stefano Carosio, Research and



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Innovation Director at D'Appolonia; Giuseppe Corallo, Project Manager for Heat Pumps at ENEA, the Italian Agency for New Technology, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development; Ennio Macchi, Director of the Energy Department at the Milan Politecnico University; and Peter Schossig, Applied Research Department Manager at the Fraunhofer Institute.

In particular, Mr. Corallo from ENEA was asked to set out the legislative aspects on a European level, while Mr. Schossig from the Fraunhofer Institute outlined the research activities currently underway, emphasising how the cultural baggage of technology could also be a distinguishing factor of excellence for Italy and Europe.

The last Round Table was on the subject of *HEAT4U: the gas industry's answer to energy and environment challenges*, moderated by Daniel Hec, General Secretary of the Marcogaz Association of European gas industries, and with the contribution of Bernard Blez, Deputy Director of CRIGEN R&D Center at GDF Suez; Henk Ensing, from the Communications Department at GasTerra; Stephen Marland, Future Projects & Innovation Manager at National Grid Gas; and Werner Wessing, Senior Vice-President for the gas technology and energy systems skills centre at E.ON Ruhrgas.

Mr. Blez, in particular, covered the delicate and current theme of the reasons that have led France, traditionally one of the most active countries in the field of nuclear energy, to dedicate particular attention specifically to the absorption heat pump technology.

The conference work was concluded by Benito Guerra, President of Robur, who looked back over the most important steps of the evolution of the technology since 1991, when Robur acquired Dometic, an Electrolux Group company, which was the business branch relating to absorption chillers up until 2004, when it was the first in the world to introduce gas absorption heat pumps for the light commercial sector. Lastly, having thanked our partners, speakers and participants, Mr. Guerra expressed his hope that the spirit of cooperation created among the members of the HEAT4U consortium would represent the basis for future developments in the field of energy efficiency and environmental protection.

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