



Last month, the Industrievereinigung Chemiefaser IVC e.V. published a post on its LinkedIn profile with the title "Dying of the man-made fibre industry picks up speed". Since 31 December 2021, 7 of the 13 fibre producers based in Germany have had to file for insolvency, which has led to the cessation of operations for the majority. For its KLARTEXT interview series, Textination asked Dr Wilhelm Rauch, Managing Director of the association, about the state of man-made fibre production in Germany.

***In the name of your association, Industrievereinigung der Chemiefaserindustrie (Association of the Chemical Fibre Industry), the bad C-word continues to be an ingredient. In times when everything per se that comes from nature is good and everything that comes from a laboratory is bad, is that courageous - or perhaps even damaging to business?***

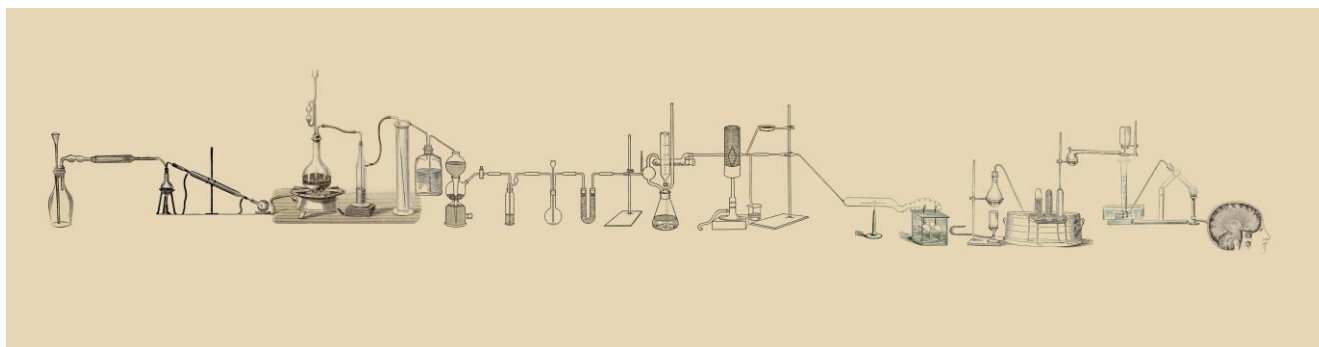
***Have you never been tempted to remove the "chemistry" from the name?***



Dr. Wilhelm Rauch

Photo: IVC

The temptation to change the name in line with the mainstream is naturally given in this day and age. Ultimately, it is up to the IVC member companies to decide. If the term "man-made fibres" is economically more successful, this is certainly an argument for a company. However, this would not change the scientific-technical basis of synthetic and cellulosic fibres - both are the result of chemical processes. By the way, this also applies to natural fibres - the whole of nature is based exclusively on physical-chemical processes. That is why chemistry belongs to the natural sciences.





***It is not only in the recent past that a lot of commitment and money has been put into researching fibres to replace those made from fossil raw materials as soon as possible. What is your opinion on this?***

Any research into new fibres is welcome. The focus is on substitutes for existing fibres as well as new areas of application. However, turning away from fossil raw materials does not necessarily mean turning exclusively to renewable raw materials. Synthetic man-made fibres can serve as CO<sub>2</sub> sinks in the future. I am thinking here of carbon capture and storage (CCS) and subsequently of products from syntheses similar to the Fischer-Tropsch synthesis, which are possible with recently developed new catalysts directly with CO<sub>2</sub> and green hydrogen. These could then be tailor-made raw materials for future man-made fibres. For despite all the enthusiasm for renewable raw materials, one should not lose sight of the environmental burdens that can be associated with them: for example, loss of arable land for food, water requirements, monocultures, etc.

***It was not long ago that the term "systemically relevant" made the rounds. In which areas is the man-made fibre industry absolutely system-relevant, i.e. indispensable?***

Man-made fibres are essential components of computers, batteries, smartphones, wind turbines, protective clothing and medical products.

***How do you see the manifold regulations of industrial fibre production by European and German authorities? Is Germany still an industrial country?***

Politicians seem to be increasingly taking great efforts to worsen the framework conditions for economic production in Europe to such an extent that investments in other parts of the world are becoming more interesting at such a rate that we are left behind. Currently, we only have the Deutsches Museum in Munich, but I increasingly see the danger that soon the whole of Germany will become a museum.



***From a security and economic point of view, how do you assess Europe's already existing dependence on primarily Asian suppliers for man-made fibres? What gives you the biggest headaches in this respect?***

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has shown what consequences dependencies can cause. The conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, which was fought with military means, also showed us how vulnerable our economy is. However, both cases have also proven that we are capable of developing a certain flexibility in politics to counter such challenges. If we look at possible military conflicts in the South China Sea and a resulting con-

frontation between China and the Western economic world, we can expect consequences of a different magnitude. Europe would then have to concentrate more on its own industrial capacities.



*If you could give a speech to the European Parliament or the German Bundestag - what would you like to point out emphatically to those politically responsible in matters concerning the man-made fibres industry?*

**Daring more democracy.** Willy Brand formulated this sentence in his first government declaration as Federal Chancellor in 1969. It still applies. In concrete terms, it means that the legislature must ensure that projects are given sufficient time to be commented on, so that experts can respond in a serious and well-founded manner. A few days are simply too short and give the impression of wanting to push through such projects without public participation. Statements are an act of living democracy. Politicians should not be afraid of this, but should look at comments constructively in order to pass solid laws, regulations and guidelines that those involved will also support.

**Less is more.** Fewer laws and regulations must be enacted, but they must be of superior quality. It must be possible to implement legal regulations in companies, which brings us back to the issue of time. Implementation in practice must be lived. Sometimes investments are necessary to comply with legislative changes. Today, one gets the impression that laws are passed in a staccato manner without first having discussed the consequences with experts. However, the economy is not a computer game in which you can influence the actions of the game characters and thus the entire course of the game in a fraction of a second. We as industry, but also as citizens, increasingly feel like such game pieces. Changing this situation is a responsible task of politics.



**Dare more market economy.** Our policies - be they national or European - increasingly bear traits of a planned economy. This is particularly evident in the energy and environmental sectors. A look around the world shows, however, that environmental protection is best advanced where the market economy is the driving force. The USA are not usually associated with a state with special ambitions for environmental and climate protection. Nevertheless, the USA in particular has significantly reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in recent years, whereas they have increased in China. Germany's very meticulously constructed system for building up non-fossil energy producers - the most expensive in the world, by the way - has also failed miserably here in terms of emissions.

**Encouragement instead of bans.** Our policy is degenerating into a policy of prohibition. How do you react to bans? You concentrate your energy on finding loopholes to get around them. You want to be the last to be hit by a ban. What we need is an incentive policy. Incentives create competition, and in competition everyone wants to be first. Energies used in a competition are always constructively focused on the goal. Here, European policy can learn a lot from the USA.

Many thanks to Dr Wilhelm Rauch for **KLARTEXT**.

#### ABOUT THE ASSOCIATION

The IVC sees itself as the organ of the man-made fibre industry in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. For more than 60 years, it has been the link between the member companies and politics as well as scientific institutes and a contact partner for everything to do with man-made fibres.

The IVC is politically independent and receives no public funding, neither European nor national.

The German association is the lead organisation for the entire European man-made fibres industry in the areas of sustainability and environmental protection, occupational and product safety as well as REACH-related issues. Accordingly, it is in charge of the international committees "Technology & Environment" and "Research & Development".

#### ABOUT THE PERSON

Dr Wilhelm Rauch has led the Industrievereinigung Chemiefaser as Managing Director since 2002.

Dr. Rauch, who holds a doctorate in natural sciences with a focus on physical chemistry, worked in various positions in the plastics-producing and plastics-processing industries before joining the association.

Currently, he sees the focus of his task as a mediator between the industry and politics in an increasingly European orientation of the industry and its constructive support in economic crisis situations.

Dr Rauch is a member of numerous scientific advisory boards as well as a board of directors of textile and fibre research institutes.