

## **EuropeOn turns 70: celebrating the history and evolution of the European Electrical Contractors Association**

EuropeOn celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024. But, how has the association evolved during its seven decades of history? And, more importantly, what is yet to come? Founded in 1954 under the name AIE (Association Internationale des entreprises d'équipement Electrique), EuropeOn has grown from its initial 5 founding associations, to representing 18 members from 16 different European countries. Let's take a dive into this incredible journey that spans 70 years and started before the establishment of the EU!

### **The Creation of the AIE**

In 1954, , five national electrical contractors' associations realised that, despite their national specificities, they had so much in common that they could benefit from establishing a permanent link between one another. It is interesting to see how these five pioneer associations acknowledged the benefits of cooperating and harmonising certain aspects of their work even before the European Economic Community (EEC) was established. Indeed, the Treaty of Rome that would kickstart the European construction project was only adopted 4 years later.

Therefore, on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1954, associations from Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Great Britain and France created the AIE (Association Internationale des entreprises d'équipement Electrique) with the main goals of sharing useful information and best practices. The headquarters of the AIE were established in Paris, with Robert Comtet elected as the first President, and Maurice Mallet as the first Secretary-General.

During its first two decades, the AIE grew really quickly, with the inclusion of members from Austria (1956), Germany (1961), Scotland (1963), Spain (1965) the Netherlands (1967), and Belgium (1969). Some of the main concerns of AIE's members were already: trade of electrical equipment (which was only regulated in a few countries), safety, standardisation, energy distribution, and apprenticeships.

From the 1970s onwards, with the strengthening of the "European" concept, the AIE decided that they should not only discuss technical matters, but also economic ones. Therefore, in 1975, the Conference of Electrical Equipment Companies held in Paris covered all areas of activity, discussing them in four different committees: technical, social, economic, and vocational training. This new division in committees allowed the AIE to focus on more diverse topics, such as the changes in the costs of labour and the impact of social security contributions, the definitions of different qualifications for personnel, or the "computerisation" of businesses.

### **The AIE after the creation of the EU**

After the creation of the European Union (EU) with the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the consolidation of its institutions, the AIE became not only a technical and economic,

but also a policy-focused body. The goal of the association was no longer limited to sharing information and best practices among its members, but also representing the interests of the electrical contracting sector at the EU level and mainly towards the European Commission. This led the AIE Council of Delegates to set up a new strategy based on the co-ordination and promotion of the common interests of European electrical installers and contractors. Monitoring the legislative process and being involved in public debates within the EU became key priorities. With the will to become an active part of the EU policymaking process, the AIE established, in 2000, its secretariat in Brussels.

The evolution of the AIE during the 2000s and 2010s was linked to the technological advancements related to the electrical sector: optical fiber technology, microprocessors, home and building automation, security, robotics, etc. Electrical contractors' businesses rapidly evolved and they upskilled to design, install and maintain intelligent systems for all kinds of industrial, commercial and domestic purposes.

Besides, the advance of renewable energy sources during these years was also an opportunity for electrical contractors to expand their activities to new markets, namely installing, operating and maintaining renewable technologies. The AIE kept highlighting this role and partnered with other associations to advocate for a European approach to the decarbonisation of the energy system, necessarily linked to electrification.

### **The AIE becomes EuropeOn**

In 2019, the AIE changed its name to become EuropeOn. This change was accompanied by the creation of a new visual identity and therefore, a rebranding of the association. After more than 60 years of existence, EuropeOn members decided that it was time for the association to modernise, in line with the evolution of the sector, and adopt a name that symbolises the role of electrical contractors in Europe 'switching on' our continent. At that time, we also decided to strengthen our ties with the European network of electrification advocates, the [Electrification Alliance](#), in which we remain very active to this day.

At this pivotal time, EuropeOn Secretariat was renewed, with its current team. There was a general consensus among members to make the skills and labour shortages faced by the European electrical sector a top priority for EuropeOn. Therefore, ahead of President Von der Leyen's presentation of the European Green Deal (2019), we launched our [#Skills4Climate campaign](#) to raise decisionmakers' attention on the need to intertwine skills and climate policies. We rallied 18 European organisations behind this message, presented our key asks to EU policymakers working on the Green Deal, and made the workforce dimension of the energy transition a central feature of our work on EU policies.

Since 2019, EuropeOn has brought the #Skills4Climate ideas to numerous conferences, events and fora such as in the Commission's Pact for Skills. EuropeOn has also kept the #Skills4Climate coalition relevant by publishing new calls to action, cosigned by original signatories as well as new ones. Over the past 5 years, we have made sure this topic is well-understood by policymakers and stakeholders alike, recently publishing a [Skills Brief](#) with the Electrification Alliance in 2023, and releasing our reports on [attractiveness campaigns](#) and on [assessing workforce gaps](#) in May 2024.

Our other main priority during these past years has been highlighting that electrification is the primal and most efficient pathway to decarbonise our energy uses and the homegrown solution to lower energy bills and increase Europe's energy independence.

Alongside the energy transition, electrical contractors have also adopted a key role in making the digital transition happen on the ground. EuropeOn has endeavoured to inform policymakers about the most suitable regulatory approach to implementing the energy and digital transitions. One example of this is our work in 2024, during our tenure as the co-Presidents of the Electrification Alliance, calling on the new European Commission to release an Electrification Action Plan. This Action Plan was finally included in the mission letter of the new Commissioner-designate for Energy and Housing, Dan Jørgensen.

### **What's next?**

As established in our [2024 Manifesto](#), we will keep pushing for clean electrification, which will only be possible if Europe is capable of building a sufficient and qualified workforce in the electrical sector. Now that the [Electrification Action Plan](#) is underway, we want this document to include an electrification target of at least 35% of final energy consumption by 2030 and emphasise how buildings can be electrified to meet EU decarbonisation targets. It should also ensure a wider digitalisation of the sector and simplify data access to foster emerging business models for electrification.

To tackle the skills shortage that the sector is currently facing, we need the Net Zero Industry Act's Net Zero Platform to become a tool for assessing the availability of relevant workforces. There should also be measures taken at the EU and Member States level to increase the attractiveness of technical education in the electrical sector, as well as to support full training curricula -including apprenticeships- and the upskilling of professionals already working on the field.

After 70 years of existence, electrical contractors remain more important than ever in tackling global challenges such as climate change, energy security, competitiveness of clean industries, the housing crisis, the skills shortage, or even pandemics, as we will demonstrate in our new Sector Report (launch on 20 November). As our sector has undergone important changes, EuropeOn has increased its role in representing

the opinions and needs of electrical contractors in Europe and will continue to do so during many more years.

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If you wish to know more and maybe attend our 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in Brussels on 20 November, contact us at: [info@europe-on.org](mailto:info@europe-on.org)