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Clouds start to appear on the horizon

The European shopfitting industry is expecting good operational results for 2008 also. Yet, the first signs of an end to the boom are there. On the occasion of ISO's annual congress from 8 to 11 May in Barcelona the country delegates of the international shopfitting organisation reported on the current business climate and the expectations for the future of their member companies. It became clear once more how much the shopfitting industry depends on the economic development of the retail and

retail businesses place their orders at very short notice, Francois Mathéron, the representative of the Chambre Francaise de l'Agencement, said. Mark Edmonds from the UK mentioned some dwindling of the propensity to spend money on shop investments among the British retailers, which he attributes to the caution of the consumers. Most British households are home-owners, usually financed with a mortgage, and many of them appear to be worried about the property crisis in the United States. On the other hand, positive market assessments could be heard from Germany and the Netherlands. Carsten Schemberg, the incumbent chairman of ISO, quoted some results of the latest survey by dlv



▲ Lofty façade art: Casa Batlló



▲ Steel processing at "dshop" in Sabadell

building trades. When those two branches of industry flourish, shopfitting does well too.

After a couple of very good business years the representatives of the Scandinavian countries now report the first signs of a weakening trend. In Norway, the apparent dwindling of the volume of retail business, as well as the restrictive course followed by the government in awarding permission for new shopping centres and retail parks, are currently causing trouble for the shopfitting industry. In Sweden, on the contrary, the leading shop furnishers continue to profit from the uninterrupted international expansion of large retail companies such as H&M and Ikea. In France a decline is expected for 2008 in the construction of commercial real estate. However, the business activity in the shopfitting firms continues to be satisfactory, although at the moment the

(German Shopfitting Association), according to which two thirds of German shopfitting companies expect turnover to grow in 2008. He added that, as before, the rising prices of raw materials continue to worry the European shopfitters.

As always, company visits and a cultural programme were part of the ISO congress. "dShop", one of the leading manufacturers of shop furnishings in Spain allowed the participants a look in its production halls, and also the visit to the factory outlet centre La Roca Village was one of the highlights of a very successful congress. There was just one drop of bitterness: whereas in large parts of Central Europe summery temperatures prevailed, Catalonia was shrouded in dense rain clouds for three days.

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