European strategy for plastics in a circular economy

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety adopted an own-initiative report by Mark DEMESMAEKER (ECR, BE) in response to the Commission's communication entitled A European strategy on plastics in a circular economy.

Plastic is a valuable material that plays an important role in our society and economy. However, the way plastics are produced, used and disposed of today has devastating environmental, climate and economic drawbacks and potential negative health impacts on both humans and animals.

The EU has a 2030 plastic packaging recycling target of 55 %. Today, however, only 30% of plastic waste is collected for recycling and only 6% of plastic placed on the market are made of recycled plastic. In addition, plastic account for 85% of the waste found on beaches and more than 80% of marine waste.

The key challenge is therefore to produce and use plastics in a responsible and sustainable way in order to reduce the production of plastic waste and limit the use of hazardous substances in plastics, so that value is retained in our economy, without harming the environment, climate and public health.

The report invited all stakeholders to consider the recent Chinese import ban on plastic waste as an opportunity for investing in plastic waste prevention, including by stimulating reuse and circular product design, and for investing in state-of-the-art facilities for collection, sorting and recycling in the EU.

From recycling to circularity: a change of design: Members insisted that all the acquis on waste and products be fully and swiftly implemented and enforced. All industry stakeholders should start taking concrete actions now to ensure that all packaging plastics are reusable or recyclable in a cost-effective manner at the latest by 2030.

The Commission is urged to fulfil its obligation to revise and reinforce the essential requirements in the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive by end of 2020, taking into account the relative properties of different packaging materials on the basis of lifecycle assessments.

Creating a genuine single market for recycled plastics: stressing that a stable internal market for secondary raw materials is necessary to ensure the transition to a circular economy, Members called on the Commission to remove the obstacles facing this market and create a level playing field.

Standards and quality verification: Members called on the Commission (i) to introduce quality standards quickly in order to build confidence and incentivise the secondary plastics market (ii) to take into account good practices in independent third-party certification and to encourage the certification of recycled materials.

Promoting the use of recycled materials: the report called on all industry stakeholders to convert their public commitments to increase the use of recycled plastics into formal pledges and to deliver concrete actions. Binding rules on the content of recycled materials may be necessary, as well as the introduction of a reduced value added tax (VAT) for products containing recycled materials.

Designing public procurement with a view to circularity: stressing that public procurement is an essential instrument in the transition to a circular economy, Members called on the Commission to set up a European Union learning network on circular public procurement. They also invited the competent authorities of the Member States to optimise controls on imported materials and products in order to ensure and enforce compliance with EU chemicals and product legislation.

Limiting the production of plastic waste: Members believe that a combination of voluntary and regulatory measures, as well as a change in consumer awareness, behaviour and participation are needed to solve the complex problem of combating the harmful effects of single-use plastics on the environment. They therefore support the Commission's proposal for a specific legislative framework to reduce the environmental impact of certain plastic products, in particular single-use plastics.

The report welcomed initiatives like plastic-free supermarket aisles which provide opportunities for supermarkets to test compostable biomaterials as alternatives to plastic packaging.

The Commission, Member States and regions are invited to support marine waste recovery programmes, if possible by involving fishing vessels in improving data collection on marine plastics.

Members supported the Commission in proposing clear harmonised rules on bio-based content and biodegradability. They pointed out that bio-based plastics can be part of a broader solution as they offer the potential for partial feedstock differentiation and can thus decrease the EUs resource dependency on third countries. They also called for a complete ban on oxo-degradable plastic in the EU by 2020.

The report called on the Commission to ban microplastics in cosmetics, personal care products, detergents and cleaning products by 2020 and to prepare a proposal for a ban, taking into account whether or not viable alternatives exist. It also called on the Commission to set minimum requirements in product legislation to significantly reduce the release of micro-plastics at source, in particular for textiles, tyres, paints and cigarette butts.

Members supported the development of a strategic research and innovation agenda on material circularity, with a focus on plastics and materials containing plastics, beyond packaging. They called for the Horizon Europe programme to include a mission plastic free ocean in order to use innovation to reduce the amount of plastics entering the marine environment.

Lastly, the report called on the EU to play a pro-active role in the development of a global plastics protocol and to ensure that the various commitments made both at EU and global levels can be monitored in an integrated and transparent manner.