

(English version)

Question for written answer E-009690/16
to the Commission
Adam Szejnfeld (PPE)
(21 December 2016)

Subject: Recycling clothing as part of the circular economy

Each year, Europeans generate more than 5.8 million tonnes of waste clothing, of which only 25% is recycled. Even worse, only a small proportion of clothes handed over for recycling can be reused, and the enterprise is not very profitable under current technological conditions. This is because the recovered fibres, e.g. cotton, are of a very low quality, while a product made from recovered polyester is more expensive than one made from the original raw material. Furthermore, there is no way to process mixed materials, which predominate the market. Old clothes are therefore most often used to produce insulation material. However, most clothes worldwide end up in landfill sites and incinerators, leading to the emission of harmful toxins into the atmosphere.

The EU has established a voluntary 'Ecolabel', which identifies products manufactured in a particularly environmentally-friendly manner. These measures are not enough though. If the quality of clothing continues to fall, demand on international markets will grow and large-scale textile processing technologies will not materialise. Then we could find ourselves on the verge of a textile disaster in which we 'drown' in our own old clothes.

— In this connection, could the Commission say how it intends to support European textile enterprises in dealing with the problem of the enormous amount of waste textiles?

— How does it intend to encourage investment in the development of textile recycling technologies as part of the circular economy?

Answer given by Mr Vella on behalf of the Commission
(14 February 2017)

With the waste legislative proposals ⁽¹⁾ adopted in December 2015 as part of the Circular Economy package ⁽²⁾, the Commission proposed ambitious targets to increase recycling and preparing for re-use of municipal waste to 65%, while limiting its landfilling below 10%. Achieving such levels entails taking action on as many fractions contained in municipal waste as possible, including on textile waste.

The proposal also envisages that Member States step up actions to prevent waste, and explicitly refers to systems promoting the reuse of textiles. It also aims at improving the functioning of Extended Producer Responsibility schemes, which are important for textiles as well, in particular by introducing a requirement that the contributions paid by the producers should be modulated by taking into account the reusability and recyclability of products.

In addition to the EU Ecolabel for textiles ⁽³⁾ which promotes products containing recycled fibres, the Commission has been encouraging innovative solutions that increase recyclability of textiles and the recovery of secondary raw materials under various EU funding programmes. For example, the ongoing RESYNTEx research project under Horizon 2020 aims at creating industrial symbiosis to boost the production of secondary raw materials from unwearable textiles ⁽⁴⁾.

The European Clothing Action Plan project under the EU Life Programme promotes a holistic approach focusing on the clothing supply chain in order to reduce textile waste and bring about effective waste recovery ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2015) 594, COM(2015) 595

⁽²⁾ COM(2015) 614

⁽³⁾ Commission Decision 2014/350/EU, OJ L 174, 13.6.2014, p. 45-83

⁽⁴⁾ <http://www.resyntex.eu/>

⁽⁵⁾ <http://www.ecap.eu.com/>