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DRAFT REPORT

on a European strategy on plastic waste in the environment
(2013/2113(INI))

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

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CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION.....	3
EXPLANATORY STATEMENT	7

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on a European strategy on plastic waste in the environment

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste and repealing certain Directives (Waste Framework Directive),
- having regard to Directive 2006/66/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 September 2006 on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators and repealing Directive 91/157/EEC,
- having regard to Council Directive 96/59/EC of 16 September 1996 on the disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls and polychlorinated terphenyls (PCB/PCT),
- having regard to Directive 2000/53/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 September 2000 on end-of life vehicles,
- having regard to Council Directive 86/278/ECC of 12 June 1986 on the protection of the environment, and in particular of the soil, when sewage sludge is used in agriculture,
- having regard to Directive 94/62/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on packaging and packaging waste (Packaging Directive),
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1013/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 June 2006 on shipments of waste,
- having regard to Council Directive 1999/31/EC of 26 April 1999 on the landfill of waste,
- having regard to Directive 2000/76/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 December 2000 on the incineration of waste,
- having regard to Directive 2012/19/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE),
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH),
- having regard to Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 on establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2011 on an effective raw materials

strategy for Europe¹,

- having regard to the Commission communication of 13 February 2012 entitled ‘Innovating for Sustainable Growth: A Bioeconomy for Europe’ (COM(2012)0060),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 26 January 2011 entitled ‘A Resource-Efficient Europe – Flagship Initiative Under The Europe 2020 Strategy’ (COM(2011)0021),
 - having regard to the Commission Green Paper on a European Strategy on Plastic Waste in the Environment (COM(2013)0123),
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A7-0000/2013),
- A. whereas plastic waste is not specifically addressed by EU legislation;
- B. whereas plastic waste can persist in the environment for hundreds of years, provoking toxic reactions and releasing endocrine disrupters, carcinogenic elements and persistent organic pollutants into ecosystems;
- C. whereas poor implementation and enforcement of EU waste legislation, illegal dumping and improper transport of plastic waste have led to significant damage to the environment and marine life, and to increases in the export of waste, resulting in loss of materials and employment in the EU;
- D. whereas eco-innovation and eco-design in plastic products are crucial to European competitiveness, helping industry adapt to the pressures of high resource prices and scarcity of materials, and developing Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) for a sustainable society;
- E. whereas the EU could benefit in terms of job creation and growth from a robust effort to move towards a balanced, cradle-to-cradle circular economy, based on the concept of waste as a resource;
1. Welcomes the Commission’s Green Paper and recognises the need for specific EU legislation on plastic waste, as well as more rigorous implementation of the existing legislation concerning waste;
 2. Stresses that in order to make the EC approach to waste streams more consistent within the framework of the ongoing legislative ‘fitness check’ and given that some 40 % of plastic waste derives from packaging while the packaging directive is the only one with a specific target for plastic waste collection, it is necessary as a matter of urgency to revise that directive by separating the waste norms pertaining to the environmental sphere from the product rules and standards as such that fall under the umbrella of industrial or trade legislation;

¹ OJ C 51 E, 22.2.2013, p. 21.

3. Stresses that the EU legislation on plastic waste should define: specific targets for collection and sorting and mandatory criteria for recyclability (clarifying the distinctions between mechanical/organic recycling and recovery/incineration; the aim should be a target of at least 75 % of recycled plastic by 2020); specific labelling of materials in order to inform consumers concerning their mechanical or organic recyclability; and, finally, criteria for the replacement of single-use and short-lived plastic products by reusable and more durable materials;
4. Agrees that plastic waste should be treated as a valuable resource by promoting its reuse, recycling, and recovery; believes that in any case landfilling should be banned by 2020, without, however, incentivising as a result the energy recovery option over recycling; considers that, alongside the targets mentioned above for recycling, it is therefore advisable to introduce appropriate sanctions for incineration of recyclable and biodegradable plastics, in order to level the playing field for different plastic types; points out that this would also invert an unsustainable tendency that has until now privileged the use of virgin products over the more expensive recycled ones;
5. Believes that the most dangerous plastics, those that are the most disruptive to human health and the environment (such as micro- and oxo-biodegradable plastics) and those which contain heavy metals that can also make recycling processes more difficult, should be phased out of the market or banned outright, as soon as possible before 2020; also believes that, as demanded by a majority of European citizens (and consumers), it is finally time to phase out or ban single-use, non-biodegradable and non-compostable plastic products, also before 2020;
6. Highlights that for biodegradable, bio-based and compostable plastics, adequate measures should be adopted to promote them, provided their production does not impact negatively on agricultural output for human or animal consumption; also believes that clearer information on their characteristics should be provided to consumers;
7. Calls for more investment in research and technologies aimed at obtaining more sustainable plastics and a better integration of various types in production processes and reprocessing activities, without affecting the quality of materials; considers that new technologies are also needed for enhanced plastic biodegradation processes, waste sorting methods, mechanical recycling, eco-design and smart packaging; believes that to this end, Horizon 2020 could offer opportunities to respond to this important societal need and that the advantages would be far-reaching, for both the environment and citizens, from the creation of new economic activities to the reduction of marine litter and health-related risks;
8. Believes that bolder steps must be taken to tackle illegal exports of plastic waste, including stricter enforcement of EU shipment regulations, as well as stricter monitoring and inspections schemes at ports and all waste treatment facilities; notes that the application of the extended producer responsibility principle, as well as consumer awareness, have a role to play in preventing illegal exports; believes furthermore that the EU should promote a coherent waste management approach in all possible international forums, agreements and institutions; also considers it essential to have access to reliable, comparable data on waste streams, flows in and out of Europe, volumes and management

systems;

9. Trusts that European municipalities and local governments will make all possible efforts to motivate citizens to adopt a circular economy concept with regard to plastic waste, by encouraging effective collecting and recycling schemes and establishing adequate collection points for plastic waste, especially in coastal areas; also believes they could make a major contribution towards harmonising plastic waste management activities throughout Europe by agreeing on common standards and practices;
10. Calls for the establishment of a European Day for plastic waste, on which citizens could return any volume of plastic waste to predetermined points in return for appropriate monetary compensation, as a means of ensuring the supply of recyclable plastic and increasing public awareness of recycling; considers that this event could also include community beach cleaning activities, as a symbolic contribution to the containment of coastal pollution caused by plastic waste;
11. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The plastic industry in Europe generates an approximate turnover of €300 billion per year and employs 1.54 million people but the data related to its waste remain unconsolidated, varying from 25 MT generated in 2008 according to the European Commission, to 13 MT in 2010 according to EEA. Without reliable and comparable data on production, collection, sorting, recycling, recovery and disposal of plastics, it is difficult to shape a targeted and effective policy, especially as regards action against illegal flows of waste. It is evident that the environmental impact of plastic is still underestimated.

As part of the ongoing “fitness check” on waste stream directives, this green paper offers a timely opportunity to aim at a cohesive and ambitious legislative harmonisation. The first step should be, therefore, the creation of a specific EU plastic waste legislation, with related targets as well as the rigid implementation of current rules.

Considering that around 40% of waste comes from packaging it is wise to begin our assessment from here. No targets are set for plastic waste except in the Packaging and Packaging Waste directive, untouched since 1994, which fixed the amount of plastic to be collected at 22.5 %. It is time to adapt norms to the new production reality and make them compatible with other sectors’ environmental obligations with respect to the hierarchy set up by the waste framework directive. If the Packaging and Packaging Waste directive is not restructured by separating the trade/industry/competition standards and norms from environmental obligations, we will not be able to tackle 40% of the problem. The revision of that directive should include rules on eco-design that allow collecting and sorting the waste for an efficient recycling, by the use of new technology (infrared and special labelling for example) and recyclable materials. This would also offer our European industry the opportunity to set standards while maintaining or even increasing their global competitiveness.

Furthermore, bigger effort as regards transparency of information should be made by industry to clearly define the characteristics of the products they put on the market: consumers need to know if the plastic they buy is recyclable, compostable, bio-degradable or recoverable, in order to ease the sorting process. This kind of innovation would fuel research and development activities and promote the creation of jobs while benefiting the environment. All this would implement the waste hierarchy and make recycling follow the re-use of plastics, but come before energy recovery by burning. The general opinion is that landfills should not even be taken into consideration as a viable option for plastic waste treatment and we hope that a definitive date for their ban (we propose 2020 considering that some Member States still have problems with a widespread separate waste collection and cannot count on other options) is going to be adopted.

Plastic is too much of a valuable resource to be land-filled or even simply burned. If we want to give coherence to the European flagship initiative on resource efficiency and embrace a circular economy concept also for plastic, the support we give to certain activities that privilege unsustainable exploitations, like land-filling, or the burning of recyclable plastic needs to cease.

Of particular importance is the need to clearly define what constitutes recovery and defuse the myth of it being equal to recycling (especially if by recovery we mean energy recovery through incineration of plastics). It should not be a choice of either or, but, instead, a linear process encouraging first reduction, then reuse and finally recycling. How can we make recycled plastic more attractive, given that the actual market prices are too high to allow a better integration of reused plastic into new plastic production processes? Why is recycled plastic more expensive than the freshly produced type? Should we not, then, give incentives to recycling activities instead of burning (as we have done until now) so that it will become expensive and unfashionable to burn recyclable and biodegradable plastic? In an ultimate analysis it is a problem that we see more and more; what does Europe want to do with its incinerators which have been sustained with direct or indirect subsidies to meet their overcapacity? It is about time that we sustain, directly or indirectly recycling plants instead. We need to bring to the market more recycled material to reduce the unit cost of its production, and make it a more viable component of the current system, while creating more environment-friendly jobs.

To that end, the introduction of targets for 75% of recycled plastic before 2020, mandatory criteria for recyclability and specific labelling to aid sorting, will launch a discussion and give impetus to the deployment of more advanced and effective waste stream management systems. This process will be further encouraged (as well as ensure that targets are met) by funding research and development on better recycling, collection and sorting techniques, as well as advanced materials, especially regarding their own reusability and durability.

The plastic types which do not feed into this model, the most dangerous to the environment and human health and those not in line with the Resource Efficiency Roadmap, like oxo-biodegradable, micro and single use, should be phased out of the market or banned outright.

Another fundamental step is to ensure collective commitment from citizens, producers and public administrations and professional associations. Within this framework, it is also paramount to enhance awareness through information campaigns promoting public awareness - such as a European day for plastic waste. The biggest effort is demanded here from local authorities: they are responsible for the organisation of all operations related to the disposal of plastics, not only household waste but also industrial and hazardous waste and, not least, waste from the coastal and marine facilities.

Marine litter is a serious problem that no campaign is going to solve alone. Voluntary actions will be decisive in raising awareness and promoting a different, responsible approach on how we manage our seas, and how we maintain bio-diversity, also a precious source of food. Part of the problem is connected to the international traffic and the weak implementation of the Basel Convention: this dimension needs a stronger commitment by both the EU and National governments. We can begin with ensuring a stricter control of flows and clearer rules in our international agreements, even those related to apparently non pertinent fields, such as technology-sharing or education: we should promote more our environmentally sound materials, processes and projects in order to have a European standard adopted globally.