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# **DRAFT REPORT**

on a European strategy for plastics in a circular economy  
(2018/2035(INI))

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Rapporteur: Mark Demesmaeker

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## MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

### on a European strategy for plastics in a circular economy (2018/2035(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (A8-0000/2018),
- A. whereas plastic is a valuable material which has a useful place in our society and economy;
- B. whereas the way in which plastics are produced and used today has devastating environmental, climate and economic drawbacks and potential health impacts;
- C. whereas these drawbacks generate wide public concern and attract broad media attention;
- D. whereas the current political momentum should be used to shift to a circular plastics economy;

#### **General remarks**

1. Welcomes the Commission's communication entitled 'A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy' (COM(2018)0028) as a step forward towards managing plastics in a sustainable way throughout the whole value chain and thereby contributing to the EU's transition towards a circular economy;
2. Believes that preventing the generation of plastic waste upfront and boosting our plastics recycling performance are both key; calls on all stakeholders to consider the recent Chinese import ban on plastic waste as an opportunity to invest in state-of-the-art recycling capacity in the EU;
3. Is convinced that the plastics strategy should also serve as a lever for stimulating new, smart and circular business, production and consumption models covering the entire value chain; calls on the Commission to foster clear linkages between the Union's waste, chemicals and product policies to this end;
4. Calls on the Commission to establish a post-2020 policy for the circular economy based on a strong research and innovation pillar, and to ensure that the necessary commitments will be available in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF);
5. Emphasises that plastics are diverse and have a variety of applications, and that a tailored, often product-specific, approach is thus required for the various value chains, taking into account local and regional demands and ensuring that consumers' functional needs are met;
6. Stresses that joint actions by all stakeholders are necessary in order to succeed and

achieve an outcome that is advantageous for both the economy and the environment; emphasises that converting general concern about plastic waste into public responsibility and behavioural change remains an equally important challenge;

### **From design for recycling to design for circularity**

7. Calls on the competent authorities in the Member States to ensure that the entire waste *acquis* is fully implemented;
8. Calls on all industry stakeholders to deliver concrete actions to ensure that all packaging plastics are reusable or recyclable by 2030, to couple their brand identity to sustainable and circular business models and to use their marketing power to promote and drive sustainable and circular consumption patterns;
9. Believes that civil society should be able to hold industry accountable for its commitments; asks the Commission to take this into account in the upcoming ‘New Deal for Consumers’;
10. Calls on the Commission to come forward with an update of the essential requirements in the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive, addressing in particular prevention, design for circularity and over-packaging;
11. Calls on the Commission to make ‘circularity first’ an overarching principle, also for non-packaging plastic items, by developing product standards and revising the eco-design legislative framework;

### **Creating a genuine single market for recycled plastics**

#### *Quality standards and verification*

12. Calls on the Commission to come forward swiftly with quality standards in order to build trust and incentivise the market for secondary plastics; urges the Commission to develop various grades of recycling which are aligned with the functionality of different products, while safeguarding public health and food safety;
13. Asks the Commission to learn from best practices with independent third-party certification, as verification is essential in order to boost market confidence;

#### *Recycled content*

14. Calls on all industry players to convert their public commitments to increase the uptake of recycled plastics into formal pledges and to deliver concrete actions;
15. Believes that mandatory rules on recycled content for specific products may be needed in order to drive the uptake of secondary raw materials;
16. Calls on the Member States to consider introducing a modulated value-added tax (VAT) for products containing recycled content;

### *Circular procurement*

17. Stresses that procurement has the power to boost innovation in business models; calls on the Commission to set up an EU learning network on circular procurement in order to harvest the lessons learnt from pilot projects; believes that voluntary actions could pave the way for binding rules on public circular procurement;

### *Waste-chemicals interface*

18. Calls on the competent authorities in the Member States to optimise controls on imported materials in order to ensure and enforce compliance with EU chemicals and product legislation;
19. Believes that the presence of a substance of concern should not be a blanket justification for precluding the recycling of waste streams for specific, well-defined and safe applications, since this could stifle innovation and discourage recycling potential in favour of incineration;

## **Prevention of plastic waste generation**

### *Single-use plastics*

20. Notes that there is no panacea to address the harmful effects of single-use plastics, and believes that a combination of voluntary and regulatory measures is therefore required to resolve this complex issue;
21. Takes note of actions already taken in some Member States and therefore supports the Commission in coming forward with a specific legislative framework on single-use plastics with the aim of halting the generation of marine litter in the EU and thereby contributing to the goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds;
22. Believes it is important that this framework offers a set of measures for the competent authorities in the Member States which is compatible with the integrity of the single market, producing a tangible and positive environmental impact and providing the necessary functionality to consumers;
23. Stresses that there are various pathways to achieving high collection and recycling rates and a reduction in litter, including deposit-refund schemes or extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes; underlines that the choice of a certain scheme remains within the remit of the competent authority in the Member State, which can take local specificities into account and ensure that any existing well-performing and cost-efficient systems are not jeopardised;
24. Underlines that fiscal policy remains a Member State competence and opposes the introduction of an EU-wide plastics tax as a potential own resource stream for the EU;

### *Bio-plastics*

25. Strongly supports the Commission in coming forward with clear harmonised rules on both bio-based content and biodegradability in order to tackle existing misconceptions

and misunderstandings about bio-plastics;

26. Highlights the importance of lifecycle assessments in order to demonstrate a reduced environmental impact for all bio-plastics;
27. Emphasises that biodegradable plastics can help support the transition to a circular economy, but are not a universal remedy against marine litter; calls, therefore, on the Commission to develop a list of useful products and applications composed of biodegradable plastics, together with clear criteria;
28. Emphasises that bio-based plastics offer potential for partial feedstock differentiation and calls for further R&D investment in this regard;
29. Calls for a ban on oxo-degradable plastic, as this type of plastic does not safely biodegrade and therefore fails to deliver a proven environmental benefit;

#### *Micro-plastics*

30. Calls on the Commission to introduce a ban on micro-plastics which are intentionally added to products, such as cosmetics and cleaning products, and for which viable alternatives are available;
31. Calls 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;
32. Takes note of the good practice of Operation Clean Sweep and the Port of Antwerp's 'zero pellet loss' initiative; believes there is scope to replicate this initiative at EU and global level;
33. Calls on the Commission to look into the sources, distribution, fate and effects of both macro- and micro-plastics in the context of storm water management in the ongoing fitness check on the Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive;

#### **Innovation**

34. Welcomes the Commission's announcement that an additional EUR 100 million will be invested to drive investment towards circular solutions under Horizon 2020; supports the development of a Strategic Research Innovation Agenda on plastics to guide future funding decisions;

#### **Global action**

35. Calls on the EU to play a pro-active role in developing a Global Plastics Protocol and to ensure that the various commitments made at both the EU and global levels can be tracked in an integrated and transparent manner;
36. Calls on all EU institutions to scrutinise their internal plastic waste management practices and to focus on prevention, together with the EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS);

37. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

## EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

### Turning plastic wastelands into fields of gold

*Circular opportunities for our environment, climate and economy*

#### **1. What is at stake?**

Plastic is an important and **valuable material** which has a useful place in our society and economy. However, the way in which plastics are produced and used today is both unaffordable and unsustainable. Plastic is developed to last in perpetuity, but is often still designed to be disposed of after use. Moreover, the collection of plastics for recycling remains very low. Out of approximately 25, 8 million tonnes of plastic waste generated in the EU each year, less than 30% is collected for recycling. This has significant drawbacks:

- 1) **A loss for the environment:** plastic waste has an especially devastating impact on marine ecosystems with plastics accounting for over 80% of marine litter. In the EU, between 150.000 and 500.000 tonnes of plastic waste enter its seas and oceans each year. Furthermore, on average, between 75.000 and 300.000 tonnes of micro-plastics are released into the environment on an annual basis in the EU;
- 2) **A loss for climate:** studies have shown that the recycling of 1 million tonnes of plastics is equivalent to taking 1 million cars off the road<sup>1</sup>;
- 3) **A loss for our economy:** estimates reveal that 95% of the value of plastic packaging material leaks away from the economy, leading to an annual loss rate of between €70 and €105 billion;
- 4) **A potential impact on health:** micro-plastics and their by-products can also enter the food chain, the human health effects of which are still inconclusive.

There is now genuine **political momentum** to promote transformational change and shift to a **circular plastics economy**. Indeed China's recent decision to ban the import of plastic waste, forces the EU to act. The rapporteur strongly believes that the EU should consider this ban as an opportunity to invest and innovate from within, and stop "outsourcing" our plastic waste problem.

This political momentum is also **supported by Europe's citizens**. A recent Eurobarometer survey makes clear that the vast majority of respondents (87%) agree that they are worried about the impact of plastic products on the environment<sup>2</sup>.

The publication of the **Commission's Communication** on "A European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy" is therefore very timely and **is welcomed** by the rapporteur. The rapporteur draws attention to the following **five general challenges**:

- We need to manage plastics in a sustainable way across the whole value chain;
- The Strategy should look beyond sustainable packaging materials, and serve as a lever for stimulating new, smart and circular business and consumption models covering the entire value chain;

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<sup>1</sup> Please see [http://presse.ademe.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FEDEREC\\_ACV-du-Recyclage-en-France-VF.pdf](http://presse.ademe.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/FEDEREC_ACV-du-Recyclage-en-France-VF.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Special Eurobarometer 468, Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment, October 2017.



- The Commission should set a post-2020 policy for the circular economy based on a robust research and innovation;
- Plastic has a myriad of applications and instead of a “one-size-fits-all” solution, a tailored, often product-specific approach, is required;
- Joint commitments and actions by all stakeholders, including cross-sector collaboration, across the value chain, are necessary and we need to change public concern on plastic waste into public responsibility.

## **2. What does it take?**

### **2.1 From design for recycling to design for circularity**

It all begins with proper waste and material management. The full and timely **implementation of the entire waste “acquis”**, including the significant improvements introduced by the recently adopted revision of EU waste legislation, by competent authorities in the Member States, is a critical first step.

Furthermore, the rapporteur supports the ambition of the Commission to **make all packaging plastics placed on the European market reusable or recyclable by 2030**. All industry stakeholders should deliver concrete actions in order to put this ambition into practice, not only for consumer packaging but equally for the business-to-business sector, and should couple their brand identity to sustainable and circular business models.

Moreover, the rapporteur believes that civil society has a role to play in holding industry accountable for its commitments, and sees the upcoming “**New Deal for Consumers**” as the ideal framework for doing so. He considers Dutch example of a “Packaging Contact Point” (“Meldpunt Verpakkingen”) to be an interesting and relevant model which could be replicated in other Member states, as it involves consumers and incentivises industry to make packaging more sustainable<sup>1</sup>.

The rapporteur firmly supports the Commission’s intention to come forward with an **update of the essential requirements** in the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD). He urges the Commission to make “circularity first” an overarching principle, which should apply also to **non-packaging plastic items** through the development of product standards and a revision of the Eco-design legislative framework.

### **2.2 Creating a genuine Single Market for recycled plastics**

The uptake of recycled plastics in new products remains low: only around 6% according to Commission figures. The rapporteur sees **four key building blocks to create a genuine single market for secondary plastics**.

#### **1) Quality standards and verification**

There is currently a mismatch between the quality of recycled plastics and the quality required for the functionality of a certain product. This is due to a lack of trust, verification and transparency. Developing **recycling grades which match the functionality of various products** and **verification** are key in this regard. A European audit scheme is already available

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<sup>1</sup> <https://meldpuntverpakkingen.nl/>

for use, EuCertPlast.<sup>1</sup> However, the rapporteur believes that an independent third party certificate, could equally offer an important step forward. The QA-CER certification scheme developed by the Belgian Quality Association could provide a model for Europe to follow<sup>2</sup>.

### 2) Push for recycled content

The rapporteur welcomes the various positive public commitments by leading industry players on recycled content, but considers it key that these public commitments are turned into concrete **pledges**. However, this voluntary approach alone may not be sufficient: the rapporteur therefore believes that **mandatory rules for recycled content for specific products may be needed**. EPR and VAT modulations could support this.

### 3) Design for circularity in procurement

Public and private procurement has the power to boost innovation in business models. Nevertheless, circular procurement remains the exception, and not the rule. In order to incentivise it, various actions could be taken, also at the EU level: in particular, stimulating and supporting innovation, research and the exchange of best practices. The EU could establish an **EU learning network on circular procurement** so that the lessons learnt from various Green Deals (e.g. in Flanders<sup>3</sup> and the Netherlands<sup>4</sup>) are gathered and offer support for the establishment of future agreements. Furthermore, lessons learnt from voluntary bottom-up actions could pave the way for establishing **binding rules for public circular procurement**.

### 4) Waste-chemicals interface

Finally, the rapporteur believes that a link with the Commission's Communication on the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation is essential to the establishment of a single market for recycled plastics. In particular, the rapporteur considers **stepping-up controls on imported materials** as an absolute necessity, while underlining that the presence of a substance of concern should not be a blanket justification to preclude the recycling of waste for certain specific, well-defined and safe applications.

## 2.3 Prevention of plastic waste generation

### 1) Single-use

Over 80% of marine litter comes from plastics, 50% of which is derived from single-use plastics. These numbers show that there are legitimate grounds to take action on these single-use items. The rapporteur therefore **supports specific legislation on single-use plastics** in order to reduce marine litter. A framework is needed which provides a set of possible measures for the competent authorities in the Member States, is compatible with the integrity of the single market, offers a tangible positive environmental impact, and gives the necessary functionality to consumers.

The rapporteur stresses that there are various pathways to achieve high collection and recycling rates and a reduction in litter, including deposit-refund schemes or EPR schemes. He underlines

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.eucertplast.eu/>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.bqa.be/files/uploads/Audits/2016\\_BQA\\_folder\\_QA-CER.pdf](http://www.bqa.be/files/uploads/Audits/2016_BQA_folder_QA-CER.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://vlaanderen-circulair.be/nl/onze-projecten/detail/green-deal-circulair-aankopen>

<sup>4</sup> <https://mvonederland.nl/green-deal-circulair-inkopen>

that the choice for a certain scheme remains within the remit of the competent authority in the Member State, taking into account local specificities and ensuring that existing well-performing and cost-efficient systems are not jeopardised. He is also eager to stress that fiscal policy remains a Member State competence, and therefore opposes the introduction of an EU-wide plastics tax as a potential own resource stream for the EU.

## 2) Bio-plastics

There are many misconceptions and misunderstandings about bio-plastics, which includes biodegradable, compostable and bio-based plastics. The rapporteur therefore supports the Commission in coming forward with **clear harmonised rules on both bio-based content and biodegradability**.

Biodegradable plastics can be a supporting element in the transition towards a circular economy, but should not be seen as a universal remedy against marine litter. The rapporteur therefore calls on the Commission to develop **a list of useful products and applications consisting of biodegradable plastics**, based on clear criteria.

Moreover, **bio-based plastics** can be part of a broader solution as they offer the potential for partial feedstock differentiation and can thus decrease the EU's resource dependency on third countries. The rapporteur believes that **further R&D investment** in this area are needed in order to spur innovation.

The rapporteur also calls for a **complete ban on oxo-degradable plastic**, as this type of plastic does not safely biodegrade and therefore fails to deliver a proven environmental benefit.

## 3) Micro-plastics

The rapporteur believes that the most cost-efficient option is to tackle the use of micro-plastics at source. He therefore calls for a **ban on micro-plastics which are intentionally added** to products, such as for cosmetics and cleaning products, and for which viable alternatives are available. The recent introduction of legislation that bans the use of plastic micro-beads in rinse-off cosmetic products in some Member States, for example the United Kingdom, prove that this is possible.

The rapporteur furthermore calls on the Commission to set **minimum requirements** in product legislation to tackle micro-plastics at source, in particular for textiles, tyres, paints and cigarette butts. He believes that the findings of the MERMAIDS Life+ project<sup>1</sup>, which focused on the mitigation of micro-plastics impact caused by textile washing processes, offers some interesting insights in this regard.

## 2.4 Innovation

Innovation, research and development, and investments in infrastructure are critical if the EU wants to succeed in developing a new plastics economy. The Commission's announcement to invest an additional €100 million to drive investment towards circular solutions under Horizon 2020 is encouraging. The rapporteur supports the development of a Strategic Research Innovation Agenda on plastics which should also look beyond 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://life-mermaids.eu/en/>

The rapporteur is also convinced that areas such as chemical recycling and applications of carbon capture and utilisation (CCU) which use carbon dioxide as a feedstock, should be part of the innovation agenda. He also calls on the Commission to build further on the experience of existing innovation clusters, such as the Flemish Catalisti<sup>1</sup>.

### **2.5 Global action**

Internationally, innovative and cost-effective efforts to address plastic waste are developing quickly. If the EU wants to lead the global agenda of the circular economy and make an impact, it must be at the forefront and play a pro-active role in developing a **Global Plastics Protocol**. The rapporteur therefore calls on the Commission to come forward with an instrument to track the various commitments in an integrated and transparent manner.

### **3. Conclusion**

The Chinese import ban on plastics waste offers an immense opportunity for the EU to promote transformational change and shift towards a circular plastic economy. We need to use this momentum to invest and innovate. If we succeed in developing a holistic approach covering the entire value chain through circular business and consumption models, we can create a win-win situation for all stakeholders involved. **We can turn plastic wastelands into fields of gold.**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://catalisti.be/>