



On 23 April, industry, municipalities and NGO representatives echoed a common message to EU policy-makers about (1) the need to clearly define Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and (2) the need to set up binding EPR minimum performance requirements in the Waste Framework Directive and Packaging & Packaging Waste Directive. This discussion took place in the context of the European Parliament’s forthcoming report on the Circular Economy.

Over 65 EU policy-makers and stakeholders attended the breakfast meeting hosted by Sirpa Pietikainen MEP and the European Parliament Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development*” on “Circular Economy and Packaging: The role of EPR”

MEP Pietikainen, Rapporteur on the own-initiative report “*Resource Efficiency: Moving towards a Circular Economy*”, emphasised the need to create a system of reward to those that are willing to invest in the new systems in order to make the needed changes happen. Furthermore, she put the accent on the need to create the same level of wellbeing to consumers and at least the same level of income for companies, while dramatically decreasing the amount of resources used: “*Resource efficiency is the new business for Europe.*”

The packaging supply chain in Europe represented by EUROPEN (European Organization for Packaging and the Environment), with speakers from Crown Europe (packaging converter), DOW chemicals (raw material supplier) and P&G (brand owner), made their message to European decision-makers clear: “*Industry needs more legal clarity on EPR, which will bring benefits in terms of more cost-effective collection and sorting of packaging waste, leading towards higher quantity and quality secondary raw material that can be re-used in the production process and in the circular economy.*” They asked for a clear definition of EPR in the Waste Framework Directive and the Packaging & Packaging Waste Directive, the introduction of Minimum Performance Requirements into EU legislation for more transparency, accountability and better enforcement, as well as more EU guidance to Member States in order to clarify individual roles and responsibilities of all and each stakeholders involved in packaging waste management.

Industry’s asked were echoed by Municipal Waste Europe’s representative, who stressed the importance of encouraging all waste recovery in Europe, of which municipal waste accounts for only 20%. Vanya Veras asked for more EPR rules and better implementation in Europe: “*We need to focus on more transparency, accountability and enforcement of the EPR systems.*”

Stephane Arditi, European Environmental Bureau, called for common criteria to be defined in order to modulate the fees to incentivise recycling: “*We do not have the right level of ambition at the European level.*” Through EPR the market incentives will be addressed, he argued, and prevention would be rewarded. Yet, he underlined the

need for flexibility, as producers will be able to make the right choices according to their situation and capacity.

Following the presentations, MEP Mark Demesmaeker, Shadow Rapporteur for the ECR, reiterated that EPR will be one of the most important pillars and most heavily debated issue in future policy discussions related to the Circular Economy. EPR is a strong instrument that can drive innovation to develop products in a new way. However, EU binding minimum requirements, alongside EU guidance will be essential to streamline EPR schemes and to create a level-playing field.

MEP Benedek Javor, Responsible for the opinion of the ITRE Committee recalled that these issues are not isolated and have to be put in a geopolitical context, as the EU is highly dependent on imported energy and resources. *“The Circular Economy is not just about reaching environmental goals but also about ensuring resources for the continent,”* he stated.

MEP Miapetra Kumpula-Natri, Chair of the ‘Bioeconomy’ Working Group of the Intergroup stressed the importance to connect EU policy discussions on the Circular Economy with other EU policy frameworks such as the Bio-economy. She highlighted the need to see the shift of the industry towards using more waste at an industrial scale. She also held that if the design of products improves, taking into account the next life of the product, a lot would be improved.

Heidi Jern, Member of Cabinet of Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen, talked about a ‘paradigm shift’: *“there is no quick fix and the changes will not happen overnight.”* So far, the Commission hasn’t come up yet with a list of legislative proposals; the team is currently looking at different options, but no political decisions have been taken yet. She announced a public consultation that will be launched in May on ways to promote a Circular Economy. On EPR in particular, Ms Jern stated that *“the Commission is looking into it”*.

The discussion with the audience focused on incentives and rewards, prevention, innovation and eco-design. The speakers expressed the hope that the Commission will reflect their inputs in its proposal.

In conclusion, Sirpa Pietikainen put down some questions for future reflexion:

1. Would a platform of different actors in packaging and packaging waste management be useful?
2. What are effective economic instruments on prevention?
3. Should the eco-design directive cover packaging as well, i.e. should we consider horizontal or sectoral requirements?
4. The concept of a Circular Economy is not at the TTIP negotiation table: could the targets in the EU be a considerable pull effect?

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