Packaging and packaging waste: reduction of the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags

2013/0371(COD) - 04/11/2013 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags.

PROPOSED ACT: Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: the European Parliament decides in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and on an equal footing with the Council.

BACKGROUND: Directive 94/62/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council was adopted in order to prevent or reduce the impact of packaging and packaging waste on the environment. Although plastic carrier bags constitute packaging within the meaning of that Directive, its provisions do not contain specific measures relating to the consumption of such bags.

The use of plastic carrier bags with a thickness below 50 microns, which are less frequently re-used than thicker plastic carrier bags, **involves a considerable amount of litter**, which will increase if measures are not taken.

Consumption levels of plastic carrier bags **vary considerably across the Union.** Some Member States have managed to reduce consumption levels of plastic carrier bags significantly, with the average consumption level in the seven best performing Member States amounting to only 20% of the EU average consumption.

To **promote similar reductions of the average consumption level** of lightweight plastic carrier bags, Member States should take measures to reduce the consumption of plastic carrier bags with a thickness below 50 microns in line with the overall objectives of the Union’s waste policy and the Union's waste hierarchy as provided for in Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: instead of establishing a common EU target, it was considered preferable to introduce into Directive 94/62/EC the obligation for all Member States to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags, while allowing them to set their own national reduction targets and to choose the measures to reach those targets.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 114 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

CONTENT: the proposal amends Directive 94/62/EC by requiring Member States to take measures to **reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags**. It stipulates that these measures may include the use of **economic instruments** as well as **marketing restrictions** in derogation of Article 18 of the Directive. The latter provision thus broadens the range of instruments available to Member States to address the unsustainable consumption of plastic bags.

For the purpose of this Directive a definition of "lightweight plastic carrier bags" is introduced, and means bags made of plastic materials **with a wall thickness below 50 microns** that are supplied to consumers at the point of sale of goods or products.