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

2013/0371(COD) - 16/04/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 639 votes to 51, with 72 abstentions, a legislative resolution on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags.

Parliament's position adopted at first reading following the ordinary legislative procedure amended the Commission proposal as follows:

Introducing a European reduction target on plastic bags: according to Members, lightweight plastic carrier bags with a thickness below 50 microns, which represent the vast majority of the total number of plastic carrier bags consumed in the Union, are less reusable than thicker plastic carrier bags, thus become waste more quickly, are more prone to littering and, due to their light weight, more likely to end up scattered through the environment, both on land and in freshwater and marine-ecosystem. Current recycling rates are very low even though plastic carrier bags are recyclable.

Parliament proposed that Member States should take measures to achieve a sustained reduction in the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags on their territory of at least **50%** within three years and **80%** within five years of the entry into force of the Directive, as compared to the average consumption in the Union in 2010, respectively.

Paying for plastic carrier bags: under the new Directive, Member States should:

- take measures to ensure that economic operators selling food **do not provide plastic carrier bags free of charge**, except for very lightweight plastic carrier bags (wall thickness below 10 microns) or alternatives to such very lightweight plastic carrier bags;
- ensure that economic operators selling food charge a price for lightweight plastic carrier bags that is **effective and proportionate** so as to achieve the reduction targets;
- ensure that economic operators selling food charge at least the same price for thicker plastic carrier bags, and that economic operators do not replace lightweight plastic carrier bags by very lightweight plastic carrier bags at the point of sale. Member States shall take such measures by two years after the entry into force of this Directive.

Member States should encourage economic operators **selling non-food items** to charge for plastic carrier bags to an extent that is effective and proportionate.

Member States should also take measures to ensure that very lightweight plastic carrier bags used to wrap dry loose, unpackaged foods such as fruits, vegetables and confectionery are replaced progressively by carrier bags that are made of recycled paper, or by very lightweight plastic carrier bags that are biodegradable and compostable. They should achieve a replacement rate of 50% by three years and of 100% by five years after the entry into force of this Directive.

Consumers should be allowed by retailers to refuse and to leave at the point of sale any packaging they consider superfluous, in particular as regard to carrier bags. Retailers should ensure that such packaging is either reused or recycled.

Substituting hazardous substances for packaging as a whole: Member State shall ensure that packaging is manufactured in such a way that it does not contain substances in concentrations above 0.01% that are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic to reproduction or that are endocrine disrupters. Member States shall ensure that packaging is manufactured in such a way that it does not contain 'oxo-fragmentable' plastic materials. Those measures shall be achieved by two years after the entry into force of this Directive.

Information campaigns: the Commission and the Member States shall, at least during the first year after the entry into force of the directive, promote public information and awareness campaigns concerning the adverse environmental impact of excessive use of conventional plastic bags. If bags are biodegradable and compostable, this should be clearly indicated on the bag with a **mark**, feature or colour code.