European strategy for plastics in a circular economy

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PURPOSE: to propose a European strategy for plastics.

BACKGROUND: around **25.8 million tonnes of plastic waste** are generated in Europe every year. Less than 30% of such waste is collected for recycling. Of this amount, a significant share leaves the EU to be treated in third countries, where different environmental standards may apply.

At the same time, **landfilling and incineration rates of plastic waste remain high** (31% and 39%, respectively). It was estimated that plastics production and the incineration of plastic waste give rise globally to approximately 400 milliontonnes of CO2 a year.

Globally, 5 to 13 million tonnes of plastics — 1.5 to 4 % of global plastics production — end up in the oceans every year. It is estimated that **plastic accounts for over 80 % of marine litter**. Plastic debris can be washed up on land and degrade into **microplastics**.

In the EU, **150 000 to 500 000 tonnes of plastic waste** enter the oceans every year.

The proposed Europe-wide strategy on plastics is a part of the transition towards a more circular economy. It lays the foundations to a **new plastics economy**, where the design and production of plastics and plastic products fully respect reuse, repair and recycling needs and more sustainable materials are developed and promoted. The Commission considers that the EU is best placed to lead the transition to the plastics of the future.

CONTENT: the plastic strategy shall lay the foundations for a new circular plastics economy. This will help to reduce plastic litter in land, air and sea while also bringing new opportunities for innovation, competitiveness and high quality jobs.

Under the new strategy, the European Union shall endeavour to:

1) Improve the economics and quality of plastics recycling: the aim is to improve the production and design of plastics and plastic products. The Commission has already proposed new rules on waste management. Once adopted and implemented, this new European legislation should do much to improve the current situation, driving public and private investment in the right direction.

The Union should in particular:

- **promote improved design for recycling while preserving the internal market**: the Commission will work on a revision of the essential requirements for placing packaging on the market. The objective will be to ensure that, **by 2030**, all plastics packaging placed on the EU market is reusable or easily recycled. It will seek to develop requirements under the Ecodesign Directive for products that take into account aspects related to the circular economy, including recyclability;
- **boost demand for recycled plastics**: weak demand for recycled plastics is another major obstacle to transforming the plastics value chain. Before considering regulatory action, the Commission is launching an **EU-wide pledging campaign** to ensure that by 2025, ten million tonnes of recycled

plastics find their way into new products on the EU market. To achieve swift, tangible results, this exercise is addressed to both private and public actors, inviting them to come forward with substantive pledges by June 2018;

- **improve the selective collection of plastic waste and modernise the Union's sorting and recycling capacity**: to encourage more standardised and effective practices across the EU, the Commission will issue **new guidance** on separate collection and sorting of waste. More importantly, the Commission strongly supports the European Parliament and the Council in their current effort to amend waste rules to ensure better implementation of existing obligations on separate collection of plastics.

2) Curb plastic waste and littering: the EU has already taken steps by setting requirements for Member States to adopt measures to cut the consumption of plastic bags and to monitor and reduce marine litter.37 EU funding is also being deployed to understand and combat the rise of marine litter.

To reduce discharges of waste by ships, the Commission is presenting together with this strategy a legislative proposal on port reception facilities. This presents measures to ensure that waste generated on ships or gathered at sea is delivered on land and adequately managed. Building on this, the Commission will also develop targeted **measures for reducing the loss or abandonment of fishing gear at sea**.

Awareness campaigns, measures to prevent littering and projects to clean up beaches can be set up by public authorities and receive support from EU funds, for instance through the European Solidarity Corps.

The Commission has started the process to restrict the use of intentionally added **microplastics** and creating labels for ‘compostable’ or ‘biodegradable’ plastics.

3) Drive innovation and investment towards circular solutions: achieving the ambitious goals on plastics recycling alone will require an **estimated additional investment of between EUR 8.4 and 16.6 billion**. Therefore, creating an enabling framework for investment and innovation is central to implementing this strategy.

In the run-up to 2020, an **additional EUR 100 million** will be devoted to financing priority measures, including developing smarter and more recyclable plastics materials, making recycling processes more efficient, and tracing and removing hazardous substances and contaminants from recycled plastics. Finally, the Commission will develop a Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda on plastics to provide guidance for future research and innovation funding after 2020.

Public authorities need to invest in extended and improved separate collection. **Well-designed Extended Producer Responsibility** schemes can play a key role to provide the necessary funding.

4) Build on global action: the EU will continue to support international action, promote best practices worldwide, and use its external funding instruments to support improved waste prevention and management around the world. In particular, the Commission will continue to make use of policy dialogues on environment and industry and dialogues under free trade agreements, and actively cooperate in Regional Sea Conventions.

The measures taken at European Union level to implement this strategy will be put forward in line with the **Better Regulation principles**. In particular, any measure likely to have significant socioeconomic impact will be accompanied by an impact assessment.