European strategy for plastics in a circular economy

2018/2035(INI) - 13/09/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 597 votes to 15, with 25 abstentions, a resolution on a European strategy on plastics in a circular economy in response to the Commission communication on the same issue.

Background: the way plastics are produced, used and disposed of today has devastating effects on the environment, climate and economy: 74% of European citizens are concerned about the health impacts of plastic products and 87% are concerned about their environmental impact.

The EU has a 2030 plastic packaging recycling target of 55 %. Today, however, **only 30% of plastic waste is collected for recycling** and only 6% of plastic placed on the market are made of recycled plastic. In addition, plastic account for 85% of the waste found on beaches and more than 80% of marine waste.

The key challenge is therefore to produce and use plastics in a responsible and sustainable way in order to reduce the production of plastic waste.

Parliament invited all stakeholders to consider the **recent Chinese import ban** on plastic waste as an opportunity for investing in plastic waste prevention, including by stimulating reuse and circular product design, and for investing in state-of-the-art facilities for collection, sorting and recycling in the EU.

From recycling to circularity: a change of design: Members insisted that all the ***acquis*** on waste and products be fully and swiftly implemented and enforced. As plastics will no longer be accepted in landfills by 2030, all industry stakeholders should start taking concrete actions now to ensure that all packaging plastics are reusable or recyclable in a cost-effective manner at the latest by 2030.

The Commission is urged to fulfil its obligation to revise and reinforce the **essential requirements** and take into account the relative properties of different packaging materials on the basis of lifecycle assessments.

Parliament called for **extended producer responsibility** by: (i) developing product standards, (ii) broadening the eco-design legislative framework to cover all main plastic product groups, (iii) adopting eco-labelling provisions and (iv) applying the product environmental footprint method.

Creating a genuine single market for recycled plastics: stressing that a stable internal market for secondary raw materials is necessary to ensure the transition to a circular economy, Members called on the Commission to remove the obstacles facing this market and create a level playing field.

- ***Standards and quality verification***: Members called on the Commission (i) to introduce quality standards quickly in order to build confidence and incentivise the secondary plastics market (ii) to take into account good practices in independent third-party certification and to encourage the certification of recycled materials.
- ***Promoting the use of recycled materials***: Parliament called on all industry stakeholders to **convert their public commitments to increase the use of recycled plastics into formal pledges** and to deliver concrete actions. Binding rules on the content of recycled materials may be necessary, as well as the introduction of a reduced value added tax (VAT) for products containing recycled materials.
-

- ***Designing public procurement with a view to circularity***: the Commission is called on to set up a European Union learning network on circular public procurement. The competent authorities of the Member States are urged to optimise controls on **imported materials** and products in order to ensure and enforce compliance with EU chemicals and product legislation.

Single-use plastics: Parliament considered that a combination of voluntary and regulatory measures, as well as a change in consumer awareness, behaviour and participation are needed to solve the complex problem of combating the harmful effects of single-use plastics on the environment. It therefore support the Commission's proposal for a specific legislative framework to reduce the environmental impact of certain plastic products, in particular single-use plastics.

Parliament welcomed initiatives like **plastic-free supermarket aisles** which provide opportunities for supermarkets to test compostable biomaterials as alternatives to plastic packaging.

Marine litter: the resolution stressed the important role that fishermen could play, in particular by collecting plastic waste from the sea during their fishing activities and returning it to port. It invited the Commission and the Member States to encourage this activity, as well as to support **marine waste recovery programmes**, if possible by involving fishing vessels in improving data collection on marine plastics.

Bio-based content, biodegradability and compostability: Parliament supported the Commission in proposing **clear harmonised rules** on bio-based content and biodegradability. It pointed out that 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. It also called for a complete ban on oxo-degradable plastic in the EU by 2020.

The Commission is called on to:

- **ban microplastics** in cosmetics, personal care products, detergents and cleaning products by 2020 and to prepare a proposal for a ban, taking into account whether or not viable alternatives exist;
- 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.

Members supported the development of a **strategic research and innovation** agenda on material circularity, with a focus on plastics and materials containing plastics, beyond packaging. They called for the Horizon Europe programme to include a 'mission plastic free ocean' in order to use innovation to reduce the amount of plastics entering the marine environment.

Lastly, Parliament called on the EU to play a pro-active role in the development of a **global plastics protocol** and to ensure that the various commitments made both at EU and global levels can be monitored in an integrated and transparent manner.