

Circular economy more than just an opportunity

Written by **Massimo Paolucci** on 23 June 2015 in **Opinion**

Now that parliament has given its support to a report on the circular economy, it's up to the commission to deliver concrete proposals, writes Massimo Paolucci.



Every year in Europe, around 600 million tonnes of reusable waste are just thrown away. In adopting ambitious new legislation, the EU must ensure this waste is transformed into new resources that can be reintroduced into the production chain.

We must move towards an economic system that focuses on sustainable growth, starting with an efficient use of resources.

Europe needs to switch from its current economic system, based on a linear sequence, in which we extract, make, sell, use and throw away, to a new system in which waste from one industry becomes raw material for another.

Factors such as resource efficiency, recovery, reuse and recycling of materials will become key elements of the production processes.

More than just an opportunity, the circular economy is a necessity for Europe, since being able to compete in the global economy will be increasingly dependent on innovation and sustainability.

It's about changing citizens' and stakeholders' mind-sets in order to develop a productive system that takes into account our planet's limited resources and cares about the legacy we will leave to future generations, as well as solidarity between regions around the world.

The transition from a linear to a circular economy is set to bring about many advantages both for industrial competitiveness and environmental protection.

According to a commission study, if the requirement for material productive factors was reduced to between 17 and 24 per cent by 2030, this would result in savings of around €630bn per year for European industry, and a reduction of two to four per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.

The European parliament expects the commission to come up with a new circular economy package that involves the full circle, focusing not only on the waste stage but also on product design and manufacturing.

The waste management hierarchy (prevention, reuse, material recycling, energy recovery, landfill) has to be completed and integrated with a resource management hierarchy that indicates how materials should be incorporated in design and production: prevention, reuse, secondary raw materials, renewable primary raw materials and non-renewable primary raw materials.

Incineration as such should be limited to non-recyclable and non-biodegradable waste, while landfilling would be a last resort, or only for specific hazardous and residual waste.

We strongly believe that binding targets on resource efficiency are needed and that the ecodesign directive must be reformed.

Ambitious proposals should be put forward to achieve a reduction of municipal and industrial waste while boosting separate collection schemes.

It is of paramount importance that the new proposals also deal with the politically and environmentally unsustainable marine litter and food waste issue.

When parliament's environment committee voted on 17 June, our message was loud and clear. We want the commission to propose a comprehensive set of legislative measures as soon as possible.

It has a strong mandate to deliver - by doing so, it can politically qualify its initiative in the next few years, with MEPs' support.

About the author

Massimo Paolucci (IT) is parliament's Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats group shadow rapporteur on resource efficiency: moving towards a circular economy