

# European parliament pushes commission to close the loop on circular economy

Written by **Ariadna Rodrigo** on 13 July 2015



**The EU's new circular economy proposals must tackle the fundamental problem of resource overconsumption, argues Ariadna Rodrigo.**

After the European commission controversially shelved its flagship piece of waste and resource legislation – the circular economy package – last year, first vice-president Frans Timmermans promised to re-table it in a "more ambitious" form.

Last week, the European parliament laid down a marker on what such an ambition should look like - and all eyes will now be on the commission to make sure it pays attention.

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MEPs voted 394 to 197 in favour of a report formalising their expectations for the revised package, calling for legally-binding targets on a broad array of waste, recycling and resource use issues.

Ahead of the vote, the worry had been that the package would be watered down and stripped of much of its legally-binding language, or even rejected outright by the centre-right EPP bloc.

National governments were also getting in on the act, with the UK Conservative administration particularly resistant to binding targets. Already bumped off the agenda from Monday to Wednesday and finally to Thursday, the report arrived bloated with split votes and amendments.

Yet in a shock development, the vast majority of measures that had been backed by the parliament's environment, public health and food safety committee in June were passed in plenary. Parliament has now officially backed strong, legally-binding measures to promote recycling, cut waste and start measuring the resources consumed in the EU.

Perhaps what is most significant is not the waste and recycling targets - welcome as they are. Recycling targets of 70 per cent for municipal solid waste and 80 per cent for packaging waste were in the original package, and the motion to cut subsidies for incineration even goes beyond what was proposed last year.

But there's a lot of political will to deal with waste and recycling - these are problems that are on our doorstep, and we can't ignore them. Instead, the most striking takeaway was a call for immediate action to start dealing with the more fundamental - but more hidden - problem of resource overconsumption across the EU.

The parliament's call for mandatory recording of 'footprint' indicators on land, water, materials and carbon by 2018 is a big step in tackling our dependency on virgin resources. As the saying goes, if you can't measure it, you can't manage it. That said, they stopped short of adopting a legally-binding target, instead endorsed a non-binding voluntary 30 per cent target to reduce consumption.

Resource overconsumption is a pressing issue, even if it's not immediately visible. Our overconsumption has massive consequences outside the EU, where most of the resources that produce our products, food and materials come from. These hidden costs range from land-grabs and forest destruction to climate change and land conflicts. It's unjust and unsustainable, and it's the responsibility of Europe's decision-makers to fix it.

Put simply, last week's vote should make it much harder for the re-tabled package to be watered down. It is effectively the baseline by which the re-tabled package will be judged - anything less must be seen as a failure.

#### **About the author**

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