

Opening speech by MEP Dr Miriam DALLI

Conference

"Waste legislation review - regions and cities for a circular economy"

Organised by the CoR, ENVE Commission, in association with ACR+, CEMR,
Eurocities and Municipal Waste Europe

Tuesday 31 January 2017, 14.30 – 17.30, European Committee of the Regions
Room JDE 51, 99-101 rue Belliard, 1040 Brussels

It is always a pleasure to come here and address you on the work that is currently going on in the Environment Committee, more so when we are dealing with a topic such as the circular economy where the role of local and regional authorities is vital.

There is no doubt that the European economy and the traditional consumption patterns we got used to over the years cannot proceed like this.

What we urgently need is a proper transition that takes us towards a system where materials can be sustainably sourced, prepared from the very beginning for reuse, eventually reused and recycled in a way that will help us limit the amount of virgin raw materials that actually enter the cycle as well as the end of life waste that would leave the cycle.

I believe in this 'philosophy' because I understand more than ever before that the natural resources of this world are not infinite, and there will be a point in time when they will come to an end.

Today, more than in previous years we are getting familiar with the notion that yes, there exists a limit to the natural resources we have. And this in turn means that our consumers and companies and us as policy makers need to have the proper answers to the increasing scarcity of natural resources. So, if for a moment I had to look from a business perspective then it is pretty evident that: repairing, reuse, recycling and remanufacturing will reduce the threat, will boost competitiveness, help profits and help business continuity.

I am the coordinator of the Socialists and Democrats in the ENVI Committee so I would like to bring also to the fore our perspective as a political group. We believe that we need to have a long-term view and obviously policies that would eventually address these long-term challenges. First and foremost the need that by 2050 the EU's use of resources needs to be sustainable. To achieve this we need to reduce our resource consumption and bring them to sustainable levels. This we can start doing by improving resource efficiency and decoupling growth from primary resources use.

Binding targets are extremely important. Without the proper ambition we can never experience real change. In this sense we need binding targets on resource efficiency; the creation of a closed loop for non-renewable resources; the phasing out of toxic substances; and the implementation of tools and measures that ensure active participation of local and regional authorities, SMEs and social economy enterprises.

Constantly making waste management better remains one of our main priorities in our vision of a sustainable economy, while the overarching principle should always be waste prevention, wherever and whenever possible.

The issue of food waste is another sensitive matter. According to the Commission nearly 100 million tons of food is wasted annually in the EU. If nothing is done, food waste could rise to over 120 million tons by 2020. This is a shocking number.

Statistics from 2014 suggest that 44% of all municipal waste in the EU is recycled or composted. This compares to just 31% in 2004, and by 2020 EU member states should be recycling or composting over 50% of waste.

If we look at specific member state data, in 2014, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden sent virtually no municipal waste to landfill, whereas Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Latvia and Malta still landfill more than three quarters of their municipal waste.

This means that almost third of municipal waste is still landfilled and less than half is recycled or composted, with wide variations between member states. Improving waste management could deliver benefits for the environment, climate, human health and the economy.

I am really satisfied with the outcome of last week's vote in the European Parliament's ENVI committee. With the results of the vote, we have shown

that we believe in the transition towards a circular economy. We decided to restore the ambitious recycling and landfill targets and we showed that we are committed to leading a transition towards an economic model that reduces waste and promotes re-use, efficiency, durability and recycling.

Focusing now on waste and packaging waste, by 2030, at least 70% of so-called municipal waste (from households and businesses) should be recycled or prepared for re-use. For packaging materials, such as paper and cardboard, plastics, glass, metal and wood, we propose an 80% target for 2030, with interim 2025 targets for each material.

When it comes to landfilling the draft law limits the share of municipal waste to be landfilled to 10% by 2030. ENVI compromises propose tightening this to 5%, albeit with a possible five-year extension, under certain conditions, for member states which landfilled more than 65% of their municipal waste in 2013.

The outcome of the ENVI vote advocates an EU food waste reduction target of 30% by 2025 and 50% by 2030, compared to 2014, and also proposes a similar target for marine litter.

The proposals strengthens also EU provisions on waste prevention and extended producer responsibility, and streamline definitions, reporting obligations and calculation methods for targets. And there will no longer be the possibility for Member States with the lowest recycling rates to have a 'blanket' derogation. They will be able to request a derogation, but it will be subject to specific conditions.

I believe that the result obtained last week can ensure a strong, ambitious and pragmatic approach to the Circular Economy.

If businesses, government and citizens all do their part, the European economy can really move to a path of sustainable growth. And let's be honest using less of the Earth's resources more efficiently will help us create a new economic model.

With regards to the next steps, the four legislative proposals in the package will be put to a vote by the full plenary at the 13-16 March plenary session in Strasbourg.