

Speech by Minister Dr José HERRERA

Conference

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

Subsession 1

Making the new waste legislation work for local and regional authorities - expectations from the negotiations on the waste legislative proposals

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

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Room VMA 3, Rue van Maerlant 2, 1040 Brussels

I believe that the discussions being held at this conference on the Waste legislative review are timely as we have now reached an important juncture on this dossier.

The Committee of the Regions, as the EU's assembly of regional and local representatives, plays an important role in encouraging greater participation of our fellow European citizens in the European project.

This mission is even more pertinent and pressing, as the EU faces enormous challenges from both outside and within the Union, and it is for this reason that the Maltese Presidency has set the overall objective of placing the European citizen back at the heart of the European Union's decision-making process.

The Maltese Presidency will therefore seek to inject new and fresh momentum into work that brings European citizens closer together and it is with this objective in mind that we have identified six overall priorities for our Presidency. These are Immigration, Security, the Single Market, the Neighbourhood Policy, Social Inclusion and Maritime Affairs.

The environmental priorities for the Maltese Presidency have been similarly inspired by this overall objective and we shall be prioritising files which will have positive and meaningful impacts on the environment and the well-being and health of European citizens. These are climate change, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the marine environment and, most pertinently for this Conference, the Circular Economy.

I've listened closely to the interesting statements made so far and welcome the interest being shown by the representatives of local and regional authorities to the ongoing waste legislative proposals. These statements and the expectations expressed reinforce in my mind the importance of the work we are undertaking, as well as the responsibility that we co-legislators have to reach a balanced agreement to not only safeguard the environment, but also ensure that the EU and European companies remain at the forefront of this rapidly growingly circular economy.

This is also reflected in the Council's strong commitment for a transition to a Circular Economy as was clearly expressed in the conclusions adopted in

June 2016. The potential benefits of the circular economy are massive and I believe that the package adopted by the Commission could be an important step towards shifting Europe's economy to a more resource efficient, sustainable model while retaining its competitive edge.

Sound waste management and the phase out of disposal methods in favour of moving up the waste hierarchy, is key to achieving this result. The Maltese Presidency has therefore prioritised work on the waste legislative proposal within the Council. The work has been progressing at an intensive pace with several Working Party meetings being dedicated to this file.

In fact, such is the pace that we're setting, the Working Party on the Environment is busy discussing the package of waste proposals as we speak, a stone's throw away!

The Council is aware of the progress that has been made by the EP and Ms Bonafe in particular, who achieved an excellent outcome in the vote on her report at the ENVI Committee meeting last week. This is of course just one step in the process, and we now eagerly await the vote on this dossier at the EP plenary in March. Nevertheless, the message emanating from the EP has been a clear and consistent call for an ambitious package that would help drive the transition to the circular economy forward.

As Presidency, we've set ourselves the aim to ensure that the pace being set by the European Parliament on this file is as much as possible replicated on the side of the Council. With this in mind, we believe that,

should the conditions be in place it would be possible for first reading negotiations with the European Parliament on this file to commence under the Maltese Presidency.

We know that this is an ambitious aim and we recognise that there is still a lot of work to be done if we're to achieve it. To this end the Maltese Presidency is working very closely with all Member States on this file, with a view to advancing discussions and seeking balanced compromises on some of the main issues, such as certain key definitions, targets and calculation rules, as well as extended producer responsibility. We're considering a number of options within the Council to tackle these issues, with a view to delivering an ambitious and realistic approach on these issues.

In conclusion, I firmly believe that the Council is moving in the right direction and that the Maltese Presidency will be able to deliver tangible, concrete progress on this file. I am certain that this is yet another opportunity for us to showcase that when we work together at the European level we can improve the health, safety and quality of life of the European citizen. As a final remark, I would like to also once again thank you and the other panellists for your contributions in this process and I [look forward to a/wish you an] excellent discussion very shortly.

Thank you very much.