

Presentation The EU Ecolabel as a driver towards meeting the Circular Economy vision

It is a pleasure for me to be with you this morning. During these 15 minutes together with you I will offer you a quick insight into Circular Economy Package adopted by the European Commission in 2015 and how a voluntary tool as EU Ecolabel plays an important role in switching to the circular mood that is a necessity for Europe.

I do not know if you are aware of this figure but, according to a recent Eurobarometer, 95% of the European citizens consider that protecting the environment is important to them personally. It is more than that, citizen's support to EC environmental policy did not significantly drop despite the challenging economic scenarios. Environment policy gathers strong support from the public opinion – more than any other EU policy area.

The European Union cannot keep growing without taking into account sustainability and resource efficiency. Rather, the Environmental policy must be a driver for growth and employment. As President Juncker has stated, protecting and preserving the environment and maintaining our competitiveness go hand in hand.

What is the Circular Economy? It is a new economic model that surpasses the traditional "take-make-dispose" economic model and substitutes it for a virtuous model where products are design to last, where the consumer is well informed and where at the end of their, lifespan the products are recycled and reused. The circular economy aims at keeping the added value in products and materials for as long as possible and eliminating waste. What used to be regarded as 'waste' can be turned into a resource.

Making the circular economy a reality will however require long-term involvement at all levels, from Member States, regions and cities, to businesses and citizens. Member States are invited to play their full part in EU action, integrating and complementing it with national action. The circular economy will also need to develop globally. Increased policy coherence in internal and external EU action in this field will be mutually reinforcing and essential for the implementation of global commitments taken by the Union and by EU Member States, notably the U.N. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the G7 Alliance on Resource Efficiency, building more sustainable supply chains and global markets for secondary raw materials. This action plan will be instrumental in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, in particular Goal 12 of ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns.

We are absolutely convinced that a circular economy can enable a triple win.

1. There are economic gains to be made from using raw materials and resources more efficiently and being less dependent on imports. There are also new business models that can be exploited.
2. There are environmental gains from moving away from a linear economy where we throw away products that could be repaired or recycled – less pressure on the natural capital:
3. Finally, there are social and employment gains by improving local waste management, from recycling, repair and re-use services.

A crucial step for circular economy is to enable consumers to make informed choices. The labelling of products is a major tool here.

The circular economy package focuses on some key sectors, which emerged, inter alia, from the public consultation. This includes a specific strategy on plastics, actions on food waste, on critical raw materials with the recycling of electronic waste, on biomass and bio-based products, and the recovery of valuable resources in the construction and demolition sector.

Plastics are an important and complex issue: today only 25% of plastic waste is recycled, whereas half goes to landfills. Large quantities of those end up in the oceans, creating marine litter. We will develop a specific strategy to address all these issues based on the latest evidence.

Food waste is particular priority area where we want rapid changes. It is economically, socially and quite simply morally unacceptable that so much edible food is wasted every year in Europe. In September, we adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including a target to halve food waste by 2030 at the retail and consumer level, and to reduce food losses along production and supply chains. The EU and its Member States are committed to deliver on this target. To that aim, we will develop a reliable method to quantify and understand food waste in order to act on it efficiently. We will also work hand in hand with Member States and Stakeholders in a dedicated platform to support the achievement of our goal.

To make all these things happen, we must reinforce circular economy-related innovation at the European level. We need to rethink our ways of producing and consuming. We need to create new technologies and business models which will shape our future.

Since its creation in 1992, the EU Ecolabel acts as a pioneer in promoting circular economy. This August after the adoption of the three new EU Ecolabel criteria sets for computers, footwear and furniture Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu Vella confirmed that: "The EU Ecolabel promotes Europe's transition to a circular economy, supporting both sustainable production and consumption. Thanks to transparent ecological criteria, consumers can make conscious choices, without compromising on the quality of the products. Similarly, the EU Ecolabel rewards those manufacturers who choose to design products that are durable and repairable, promoting innovation and saving resources".

The Circular Economy Action Plan presented by the Commission in 2015 focus on aspects along the whole product life, from production and design, consumption and public procurement, waste management and new business models that facilitate reuse and recycling. In the production phase EU Ecolabel contributes to sustainable supplies, eco-design, life span lengthening while in the consumption phase we have responsible consumption and waste management (recycling).

EU Ecolabel products are of

- of high quality and easy to refurbish (reuse)
- materials easy to recycle,
- cleans the material circle by banning the use of hazardous substances (high quality recycles after the product service life)
- promotes the use of recycled content
- promotes the use of sustainably sourced materials.

Let me give you some examples, regarding sustainable management of resources, e.g. the textile product group, focuses mainly on fibre. The criteria require a **minimum recycled composition** (as polyester and nylon for example) as well as both legal and sustainable sourcing of timber (mainly for the viscose). This criterion isn't only specific to textile products but it is also something we require in the EU Ecolabel criteria for product groups such as furniture, wooden floor covering or paper product groups.

Another example would be the computer and television product group which has also a set of requirements regarding **recyclability**. A minimum percentage of the plastic used should be

sourced from recycled contents and the licence holders should also take measures to ensure the recyclability of the product itself.

For example, a guarantee of **superior longevity** is required also to paint products in order to reduce the number of coats of paint needed for optimal paint coverage and durability. In the case of furniture, in addition to a mandate on producing products that are more durable and easier to repair, the new criteria require manufacturers to conduct a more comprehensive life cycle assessment, while paying special attention to the hazardous compounds and residues, which in some cases could contribute to indoor air pollution.

As i've mentioned before this year, 3 new product groups have been adopted: furniture, computers and footwear.

There are new developments for computers product group, where energy efficiency and device upgradability will need to be considered during the design and manufacturing process, along with taking into account how easy it is to dismantle, recover and recycle resources from the devices.

Lately special attention is also given to improving Corporate Social Responsibility with regard to labour conditions which will apply to the final footwear assembly site or for the employees of the EU Ecolabel tourism accommodation services.

There is revision process undergoing also on detergents product group, where microplastics are going to be excluded from entire product group.

The use of bio based products will be also limited. The detergent and cleaning product industry uses some organic ingredients, such as surfactants, that can be obtained either from fossil (e.g. mineral oil) or renewable (e.g. coconut oil or palm kernel oil) raw materials. At present, surfactants based on a combination of palm kernel oil or coconut oil and non-renewable raw materials account for almost 50% of the total amount of surfactants used in the detergent and cleaner product industry. Therefore, it will be requested that those products are certified by sustainable schemes of custody. The inclusion of the criteria is crucial to tackle attributed environmental impacts locally and overseas.