



GLOBE
EUROPEAN UNION EU

Event Summary

Circular lunch “How to optimize waste flows to maximize its reuse and recycling”

June 22, 2017, European Parliament, room 03K002

GLOBE EU President Sirpa Pietikäinen opened the debate before passing on the baton to Reinhard Bütikofer, GLOBE EU member and co-chair of the event. Sirpa highlighted some key issues: if waste is not a problem but a resource, how do we make sure that the EU becomes a better market for these resources; what do we do with the incineration overcapacity in certain parts of Europe especially when proper waste management will reduce the amount of waste being burned significantly; and how do we assure consistent high quality secondary resources?

EuRIC’s Secretary-General Emmanuel Katrakis kicked off the discussion with a presentation of the European recycling industry. He stressed the need for making sure that procedures, including procedures for intra-trade waste shipments, meet the objectives of the circular economy if we want to incentivize recycling. For instance, he suggested that paper notification be replaced by electronic notification. Also, he positioned that a fast-track notification procedure for pre-approved agents should be implemented EU-wide. He stressed, moreover, that simplification of waste shipments procedures will free up time for the competent authorities to deal with problematic waste streams or fight illegal shipments. Finally, Emmanuel emphasized the need for harmonized definitions.

Eurometaux’s Chris Heron focused on the lack of a global level playing field and barriers to waste shipments in the EU. Indeed, only one-third of electronic waste in the EU is recovered although recycling capacity is available in Europe for the full amount. He stated that high-quality recyclers often compete with low-quality recyclers and that a level playing field should be created by setting quality standards. This would mean that recyclers outside the EU have to comply with the same standards before they can accept EU waste. Standards recently adopted within CENELEC are a good start but they need to be made legally binding as a next step. Chris also mentioned

that faster and more efficient shipments would help recyclers to compete. This could be effected by allowing waste shipments to pre-approved recyclers without prior notification of the competent authorities.

Peter Wessman from DG ENV commented that the revised waste shipment regulation (adopted in 2014) already puts more opportunities in the hands of inspectors to track down illegal shipments. Also, recyclers outside the EU are now obligated to prove that their recycling processes are environmentally sound. Finally, he mentioned that guidelines on environmentally sound management (so-called ESM toolkit) had been adopted under Basel Convention.

After Mr Bütikofer opened the floor, it was argued by one participant that making waste shipments easier would lower the incentive for waste producers to reduce the amount of waste they produce. Others considered, however, that certain materials require economies of scale and that recycling cannot be carried out locally.

It was mentioned by another participant that compliance with local conditions should not be confused with equivalent conditions (for EU-based recyclers). International certification of recyclers was considered helpful in clarifying “equivalent conditions”.

An example was given of recycling along the value chain, where some of the more laborious tasks can be carried out outside the EU whereas the more specialized tasks should be done in the EU after the dismantled and sorted electronic wastes have been shipped back.

Following Sirpa’s suggestion that upgraded certification could be linked to external audits and sanctions in case of intentional and long-term violation of standards, one participant mentioned certification outside of the EU as a potential problem. This lack of jurisdiction, however, could be resolved by asking foreign companies to set up a subsidiary in the EU. Other participants stressed that certification should not be used to squeeze SMEs out of the market although it was generally recognized that certain standards can only be met by larger companies.

It was mentioned that the ESM toolkit contains a “repair loophole” that could be used to avoid waste characterization for defunct electronic goods. New criteria were considered helpful for custom authorities to distinguish between a (repairable) product and a waste.

Besides the need to make sure that member states implement waste legislation adopted at EU level, ensuring price competition between primary and secondary raw materials was considered equally important.

Participants also agreed on the importance of having end-of-waste criteria at EU level. Where absent, EU criteria for certain streams could be replaced through mutual recognition of national criteria. Setting EU-wide criteria would be very time consuming.

The IEES mentioned having initiated a study on EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) schemes with Ellen MacArthur Foundation and the EEB.