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Circular Economy for plastics: Ambitious targets for the environment – and for workers!

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Public hearing “EU Strategy for plastics in a Circular Economy”

European Economic & Social Committee

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industriAll European trade union supports the Circular Economy policy goals

Policy Brief “**Industrialised Circular Economy**” – Apr 2016

Policy objectives:

- Secure, affordable, high-quality **raw materials** – sustainably
- Low-carbon, competitive **energy-intensive industries**.

Obstacle: reach the **cost** and **quality** levels of linear economy, in all Circular Economy processes (design, maintenance, repair, dis-assemble, upgrade, re-manufacture, recycle)

How to overcome: **industrialised** processes, with support of **digital** technologies

Consequences on industrial employment: contradictory effects

- Fewer units produced
- + More hours per unit
- + More activity in design
- + More activity in maintenance / repair
- + Market for ICT, automation, robotics
- + Mobilisation of EU sector strengths
- + Activity in dis-assembly
- + *Lower cost for labour (in case of tax shift)*
- + Available raw materials
- + Competitive and sustainable energy-intensive industries

industriAll Europe supports the industrial objectives of the Plastics Strategy (1/3)

Design for recyclability and re-usability

- Revising Essential requirements for packaging, with ambitious targets
 - Eco-Design requirements for industrial goods incorporating plastics
- => **Market Surveillance!** (cf. iAllE Policy Brief Oct-2016)

industriAll Europe supports the industrial objectives of the Plastics Strategy (2/3)

Demand for recycled plastics

Standards

Recycling must preserve **quality**, for infinite number of cycles – no down-cycling!

Issue of **purity** vs. hazardous chemicals, additives, colours =>
Restrictions to allowable additives / colours? Separate collection + sorting?

industriAll Europe supports the industrial objectives of the Plastics Strategy (3/3)

Innovation

- Traceability of plastics, including additives / colours: watermarking, tagging, (blockchain?)
- Automated dis-assembly lines based on “product passport” information containing machine-readable instructions

Employment concerns in the plastics sector (1/2)

Fully closed loop of plastics packaging =

39.9% of virgin plastics replaced with recycled plastics =

39.9% of basic **monomer** production (ethylene, propylene, vinyl chloride, ...)
made **redundant** by the availability of **secondary polymers**

+ **New activity** in the **chemical processing** of secondary polymer

Predictable development (target date 2030) => **Anticipation** necessary:

- Reconversion of facilities?
- **Training of workers!**

Employment concerns in the plastics sector (2/2)

Now: **differentiation** of product + packaging via colour / additives for custom-made features (gloss, shine, transparency / opacity...)

Possible future: **commodification** of plastic packaging due to restrictions in the usage of colour / additives for the sake of easy recycling. Pressure on price, wages, working conditions

⇒ Other modes of product differentiation: certified quality, standards, environmental footprint?

⇒ Other modes of packaging differentiation: shape, paper label?

Thank you for your attention!

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Circular Economy: preserve the value of industrial objects

