

## European Parliament resolution of 14 January 2014 on a European strategy on plastic waste in the environment (2013/2113(INI))

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste and repealing certain Directives (Waste Framework Directive),
- having regard to Directive 2006/66/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 September 2006 on batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators and repealing Directive 91/157/EEC,
- having regard to Council Directive 96/59/EC of 16 September 1996 on the disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls and polychlorinated terphenyls (PCB/PCT),
- having regard to Directive 2000/53/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 September 2000 on end-of-life vehicles,
- having regard to Council Directive 86/278/ECC of 12 June 1986 on the protection of the environment, and in particular of the soil, when sewage sludge is used in agriculture,
- having regard to Directive 94/62/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on packaging and packaging waste (Packaging Directive),
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1013/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 June 2006 on shipments of waste,
- having regard to Directive 2011/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 8 June 2011 on the restriction of the use of certain hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment (RoHS),
- having regard to Council Directive 1999/31/EC of 26 April 1999 on the landfill of waste,
- having regard to Directive 2000/76/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 December 2000 on the incineration of waste,
- having regard to Directive 2012/19/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 July 2012 on waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE),
- having regard to Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH),
- having regard to Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 on establishing a framework for Community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 September 2011 on an effective raw materials strategy for Europe<sup>(1)</sup>,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 13 February 2012 entitled 'Innovating for Sustainable Growth: A Bioeconomy for Europe' ( COM(2012)0060),

– having regard to the Commission communication of 26 January 2011 entitled ‘A resource-efficient Europe – Flagship Initiative under the Europe 2020 Strategy’ (COM(2011)0021) and to the European Parliament resolution of 24 May 2012 on a resource-efficient Europe<sup>(2)</sup>,

– having regard to the Commission communication entitled ‘Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020’ (COM(2011)0244) and to the European Parliament resolution of 20 April 2012 on ‘Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020’<sup>(3)</sup>,

– having regard to the Commission Green Paper on a European Strategy on Plastic Waste in the Environment (COM(2013)0123),

– having regard to Decision No 1386/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020,

– having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,

– having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A7-0453/2013),

A. whereas plastic waste is not specifically addressed by EU legislation and is considered as part of the general waste stream, with no account taken of its specific characteristics; whereas this type of waste should no longer be seen as mere garbage but instead should be regarded as a resource;

B. whereas plastic materials are becoming increasingly diverse and their use is on the rise, leading to larger volumes of waste and increasing combination with other materials and compounds; whereas plastic accumulates in large quantities (a total of 80 MT is estimated to be floating in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans) and persists in the environment for hundreds of years, killing marine life, provoking toxic reactions and releasing endocrine disrupters, substances that are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction, nanoparticles, and persistent organic pollutants into the ecosystems and hence the food chain; whereas in 2010 alone, 95,5 billion plastic bags were placed on the EU market, the majority of which were intended to be used only once, while they are restricted or banned in many countries;

C. whereas poor implementation and enforcement of EU waste legislation by Member States, lack of relevant targets and price mechanisms, insufficient internal demand for recycled materials, illegal dumping, illegal exports and improper storage, and processing and transport of plastic waste have led to significant global damage to human health and the environment, including marine life, and to increased exports of waste, resulting in loss of materials and employment in the EU;

D. whereas a ban on dumping plastic waste will not by itself lead to the desired recovery of raw materials if the quantities concerned are taken to incinerators instead;

E. whereas, in the case of plastic waste, the focus must be placed on prevention and minimisation, encouraging producers to choose alternative, more sustainable materials when designing their products;

F. whereas eco-innovation and design in plastic products are crucial to European competitiveness, helping industry adapt to the pressures of high resource prices and scarcity of materials, and developing Key Enabling Technologies (KETs) for a sustainable society;

G. whereas the EU could benefit in terms of job creation and growth from a robust effort to move through increased recycling towards a balanced, resource-efficient, non-toxic, cradle-to-cradle circular economy, based on the concept of non-hazardous waste as a raw material source; whereas the economic potential for recycling of plastic waste is currently much higher than the 33 % achieved with

regard to plastic packaging waste and the 25 % achieved with regard to total plastic waste, and high recycling rates can help when there is a shortage of raw materials;

H. whereas the plastics industry in the EU employs about 1,6 million people;

I. whereas the Europe 2020 strategy calls for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth;

1. Welcomes the Commission's Green Paper and recognises the need for specific measures on plastic waste in EU legislation, as well as more uniform, consistent and rigorous implementation and enforcement of the existing legislation concerning waste, specifically with regards to the waste hierarchy: prevention, reuse, recycling, and recovery, and in particular in those Member States which are not yet achieving the existing objectives and targets;

2. Considers that strategic planning can serve as the starting point for effective waste management;

3. Stresses that in order to make the EU's approach to waste streams and the circular economy more consistent within the framework of the ongoing legislative 'fitness check', and given that some 40 % of plastic waste derives from packaging and mostly from single-use products while the Packaging Directive is the only one with a specific target for plastic waste collection, it is necessary as a matter of urgency to revise that directive and propose plastic waste norms that go beyond product rules and standards; considers that in order to achieve this, and when drawing up future proposals, the Commission should bear in mind the fact that plastic waste is not a homogeneous material, and that plastic waste streams are made up of a number of materials, additives and plastic compounds of different types that need to be processed in different ways; notes, however, that although plastic packaging helps to maintain the quality and extend the shelf-life of products it is not always necessary for product conservation;

4. Stresses that the EU legislation on plastic waste should aim first at its reduction, and should therefore be revised in order to include:

- specific binding targets for collection, sorting (which could reach the ambitious level of 80 %) and recycling of the various plastic waste streams (for example WEEE, end-of-life vehicles, packaging, agricultural waste, building waste, etc) and mandatory criteria for recyclability (clarifying the distinctions between mechanical/organic recycling and recovery/incineration); the aim should be a progressive and ambitious target for recycled plastic free from hazardous additives that are no longer allowed to be used in new products, to be reached by 2020; some Member States will require transitional periods in which to meet the objectives set at European level;
- the EU-wide harmonisation of criteria for collection, sorting and general waste management, with a view to creating a level playing field in accordance with the waste hierarchy, including the removal of technical, regulatory, administrative and financial barriers to recycling;
- specific labelling of materials in order to inform consumers concerning mechanical or organic recyclability of products, together with indications for consumers on how to increase sorting and recycling; and
- criteria for the replacement of single-use and short-lived plastic products by reusable and more durable materials;

5. Agrees that plastic waste should be treated as a valuable resource by promoting its reuse, recycling, and recovery and by enabling the creation of an adequate market environment; calls on the Commission to make proposals by 2014 to phase out the landfilling of recyclable and recoverable waste by 2020, without, however, incentivising as a result the energy recovery option over recycling, and ensuring that environmental efficiency criteria are applied to all options; considers that, alongside the targets mentioned above for recycling, it is therefore essential to introduce appropriate measures discouraging incineration of recyclable, compostable and biodegradable plastics, in order to optimise the life-cycle of each plastic type while respecting the waste hierarchy; points out that this would also

invert an unsustainable tendency that has until now privileged the use of virgin products over the more expensive recycled ones; stresses that the recyclability and reparability of products should be taken into account already at the design phase; calls on the Commission, therefore, to propose measures relating to design that improve the overall environmental impact of products, preventing excess waste and promoting recycling markets; believes that in any case plastic goods should be designed to maximise durability, taking into account the whole life-cycle of the product; points out, that in the context of new legislation on plastic waste, the Commission should consider establishing more extensive inspections as regards landfill waste acceptance up to 2020, as well as stepping up checks on incineration facilities;

6. Urges that plastic waste be used for energy recovery only in cases where all other possibilities have been exhausted and where the technology used includes the requisite purification systems for preventing environmental damage and harm to human health;

7. Believes that the most dangerous plastics, those that by scientific evidence are shown to be the most disruptive to human health and the environment (such as micro- and oxo-biodegradable plastics) and those which contain heavy metals and other substances that can also make recycling processes more difficult, should be phased out of the market or banned outright, as soon as possible before 2020 to in order develop a market for reused and recycled materials, and believes that separate collection of these should be immediately implemented; in this framework, believes that the replacement of dangerous plastic materials and additives should be supported, including through the extension of the restricted substances list in RoHS; also believes that, as demanded by a majority of European citizens and consumers<sup>(4)</sup>, the use of single-use plastic bags should be radically reduced and where possible phased out, and that it is important to address the challenge of waste prevention through by more efficient action to tackle overconsumption and the irresponsible disposal of single-use products;

8. Points out that, in a world in which natural resources, including arable land, are increasingly scarce, sustainability means consuming fewer resources in absolute terms, and not merely replacing one resource with another; stresses that in the case of biodegradable, bio-based and compostable plastics adequate measures should be adopted to promote them, provided their production does not impact negatively on agricultural output for human or animal consumption or on the environment; also stresses the need to build upon already recognised European standards (i.e. CEN 13432) in order to enable a clearer differentiation between degradable, biodegradable and compostable plastic products together with the provision of clearer information on their characteristics, recyclability and potential for reuse, to consumers as well as to recyclers and waste management operators;

9. Calls for more public and private investment in research and technologies aimed at obtaining more sustainable plastics (i.e. consuming less raw material while maintaining the same quality, reusability and recyclability) and a better integration of various types in production processes and reprocessing activities, without affecting the quality of materials; considers that new technologies are also needed for enhanced plastic biodegradation processes, waste sorting methods, processing and mechanical recycling, recovery of plastics from oceans, eco-design and smart packaging; believes that to this end, Horizon 2020 could offer opportunities to respond to this important societal need and that the advantages would be far-reaching, for both the environment and citizens, from the creation of new economic activities (for instance high-standard sorting carried out with human labour power) to the reduction of marine litter and health-related risks; stresses that this can offer young people in particular the opportunity to engage in new fields of activity and thus become integrated into the job market; points out that full implementation of EU waste legislation could save EUR 72 billion a year, increase the annual turnover of the EU waste management and recycling sector by EUR 42 billion, and create over 400 000 jobs by 2020; emphasises that other EU funds can also contribute significantly to the development of collection and recycling infrastructure if they are used consistently in accordance with the waste hierarchy in the Framework Directive on Waste;

10. Advocates measures that encourage plastic recycling as the best option to meet environmental targets; calls for more public procurement tenders, including those of the European institutions, to

include clear demands as regards the recycling of plastic waste as well as favouring the use of recycled plastic where possible;

11. Believes that bolder steps must be taken by both the Member States and the Commission to tackle illegal exports and dumping of plastic waste, including stricter enforcement of EU shipment regulations, as well as stricter monitoring and inspection schemes at ports and at all waste treatment facilities, targeting suspected illegal transfers and combating the export of waste for reuse (mainly end-of-life vehicles and WEEE), and to ensure that exports go only to facilities that fulfil the requirements of environmentally sound management as laid down in Article 49 of the Waste Shipment Regulation; notes that the application of the extended producer responsibility principle, as well as consumer awareness, have a role to play in preventing illegal exports and in a significant reduction of plastic waste in the environment; believes furthermore that the EU should promote a coherent waste management approach in all possible international forums, agreements and institutions; stresses that the EU should lead a global initiative to monitor and significantly reduce marine litter in the oceans; also considers it essential to have access to reliable and comparable data on waste streams, flows in and out of Europe, volumes and management systems;

12. Believes that the financing of waste recycling infrastructure should take priority over the financing of waste dumping and incineration, but should also of course take into account the needs of each individual community; encourages European municipalities and local authorities, the plastics industry, and the recycling and waste management sector to make all possible efforts to motivate and incentivise citizens and businesses to adopt a circular economy concept with regard to plastic waste, beginning with a wide debate on planned obsolescence, by promoting easy and effective separation collection, reuse and recycling schemes and establishing adequate collection points for plastic waste, especially in coastal and environmentally vulnerable areas, starting out in terms of priority from those areas that the Member States have declared to be protected areas and/or national parks; also believes they could make a major contribution towards harmonising plastic waste management activities throughout Europe by agreeing on common standards and practices; calls on regional authorities to cooperate in integrated waste management planning where it is both environmentally and financially viable, and to promote in particular the establishment of 'agricultural collection centres' for plastic waste streams from agriculture (e.g. greenhouse plastics);

13. Advocates, with a view to fostering awareness-raising, concrete actions and campaigns such as the establishment of a European Day for plastic waste, when citizens could return any volume of plastic waste to predetermined points, for example in return for appropriate monetary compensation, as a means of ensuring the supply of recyclable plastic and increasing public awareness of recycling and resource efficiency; considers that this event could also include community cleaning activities (e.g. at beaches), as a symbolic contribution to the containment of pollution from plastic waste; calls for synergies between this kind of event and the 'Let's do it' campaign, European Waste Reduction Week and the forthcoming 'Clean-up Day'; welcomes the Commission's MARELITT pilot project for removing marine litter from Europe's four regional seas and reducing the environmental, health, economic and social impact of marine plastic litter; suggests that the Commission step up its dialogue with third countries, such as those with Black Sea territorial waters, in order to address the problem of marine plastic litter more effectively;

14. Stresses that new initiatives at EU level in the areas of environmental policy, eco-innovation, waste management and bio-economy should be preceded by solid impact assessments, including of their social consequences and the labour market opportunities generated, in particular as regards job creation potential and the need to introduce initial and vocational training in order to create green jobs;

15. Recalls that the Member States should, while reconciling economic and environmental issues, support initiatives that facilitate the development of sectors with the highest employment potential for decent work and, in particular, that aid in the transition towards a sustainable economy and the creation of sustainable quality jobs in a less resource-intensive economy, in line with the Europe 2020 strategy; calls on local and regional authorities to coordinate public service provisions with

environmental targets and objectives in order to achieve multiple objectives and stimulate green jobs in the process;

16. Regards identifying the future needs of the labour market, and future skills requirements, as a priority; emphasises the need for strategies for matching workers' skills with the future needs of the labour market; underlines, in this context, the fact that – in order to tackle the challenges posed by the transition to a less resource-intensive economy – appropriate levels of training and skills are needed for eco-innovations to flourish and for EU waste legislation to be correctly implemented; recommends that the Member States integrate the circular economy model in their professional training schemes; notes that training can improve the perceived status of work in the recycling sector, and can help improve staff retention and health and safety practices; recalls in this context that, by promoting vocational training and work-based learning, the European Social Fund can help satisfy the demand for sustainable quality jobs in less resource-intensive industries, in line with the Social Investment Package presented by the Commission in February 2013;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

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(1) OJ C 51 E, 22.2.2013, p. 21.

(2) OJ C 264 E, 13.9.2013, p. 59.

(3) OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 99.

(4) Consultation on options to reduce the use of plastic carrier bags and options to improve the requirements of biodegradability in Directive 94/62/EC on packaging and packaging waste and the visibility of biodegradable packaging products to consumers – statistics:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/packaging/pdf/statistics\\_consultation.xls](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/packaging/pdf/statistics_consultation.xls)