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The role of the European Parliament 2014-2019 in moving Europe to resource efficiency

Prepared by Ariadna Rodrigo | March 2014

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Incoming Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), who will be elected in May 2014, will have in their hands the potential to make the EU more resource efficient. Decisions made during their mandate have the possibility to make Europe a resilient continent to resource price fluctuation and increases, create half a million jobs in Europe, and have positive benefits for our environment.

Since the publication of the EU's 'Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe' in 2011, the resource-use debate has become bogged-down in academic arguments rather than focusing on the adoption of real measures to reduce Europe's overconsumption of resources.

In a resource-constrained world, in which resource prices have risen by 150% in the last decade¹, and with recycling levels across the EU as low as 40%², it is absurd that the EU does not have a single robust resource use policy. Current resource use policy is fragmented, lacking clarity and focus, and suffers from being split across different departments within the European Commission which do not share a coherent approach.

New MEPs can trigger the changes we need when they discuss and vote on the circular economy package and by incorporating resource efficiency vision and principles into different policies. This briefing highlights the opportunities for the European Parliament 2014-19 to support a robust resource efficiency policy.

How can Europe reap the benefits of better resource use?

1. Measure and reduce the EU's resource consumption

At the moment, the EU doesn't have a good grasp of the resources it is dependent on, and in which quantities. And what we do not measure we cannot manage. Reducing waste and finding efficiencies across the supply chain are positive steps. But it is essential that these efficiencies don't lead to the so-called 'rebound effect'³ (increased consumption due to increased efficiency). Therefore, the EU needs to measure and reduce its land, materials, water and carbon footprints.

Using a consumption-based 'footprint' methodology is the only way to measure the overall quantity of resources that Europe consumes. It has a life-cycle perspective and includes the embedded or indirect use of resources for the production of an item, irrespective of where it is produced. As Europe is a net importer of resources, no other indicator provides a complete picture of the overall scale of the resources consumed. The 'footprint' methodology tell us, for example, that the water footprint of a t-shirt is 2,500 litres⁴, and the land footprint of a car is 150m²⁵, both using resources mostly from outside the EU.

¹ McKinsey (2011) http://www.mckinsey.com/features/resource_revolution

² Eurostat (2013) http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/8-04032013-BP/EN/8-04032013-BP-EN.PDF

³ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/pdf/rebound_effect_report.pdf

⁴ Water Footprint Network <http://www.waterfootprint.org/?page=files/productgallery>

A set of indicators is essential to avoid aggregated indicators (where different types of resources are added up into one number). Aggregated indicators use unreliable assumptions in order to transform different types of data (e.g. greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use, material flows, etc) into one figure. This results in important information being lost during the procedure.

EU climate policy is made based on the measurement of emissions of greenhouse gases, setting targets to reduce these emissions, and then the creation of policies to achieve emission reductions. Resource efficiency policy should be the same. The EU needs to measure its resource consumption by calculating its carbon, water, material, and land 'footprints' and introducing measures to reduce these.

Additionally, these indicators need to be used in impact assessments of proposed policies in order to inform decision-makers about the extent to which the policy, if implemented, will change Europe's consumption of resources in the future. For example, an impact assessment of new proposals regarding biofuels, or the bioeconomy, should include an estimation of the impact on land, water and carbon footprints.

In the European Commission's circular economy package, MEPs need to push for:

- The measurement of land, water, materials and carbon footprints for the EU and member states
- Resource reduction targets to avoid the rebound effect and be able to reap positive benefits
- Use of the 4 indicators in impact assessments of proposed policies.

2. Landfill and incineration are directly opposed to a circular economy and resource efficiency

At the moment, the EU allows 60%⁶ of its municipal waste to escape the economic cycle via landfill and incineration. These practices increase the EU's dependency on the availability and affordability of a continuous flow of virgin resources. This is in direct opposition to the goal of zero residual waste⁷ and a circular economy included in the Roadmap to a resource efficient Europe.

Europe is wasting valuable (often non-renewable) resources, and what's more it is throwing away the equivalent 5 billion euros a year⁸. Landfill and incineration stop the EU from reusing resources that already are in the economic cycle. They are also preventing the creation of up to 500,000 jobs in the recycling and reuse sectors in Europe⁹. Mismanaging resources via landfill and incineration is also

⁵ Friends of the Earth Europe (2013) What is the land footprint? Infographic <http://www.foeeurope.org/media/2985>

⁶ Eurostat (2013) http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/8-04032013-BP/EN/8-04032013-BP-EN.PDF

⁷ European Commission (2011) Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe, pages 7 – 8
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/resource_efficiency/pdf/com2011_571.pdf

⁸ Georgeson, Ray (2009) Gone to waste http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/FoEE_gone_to_waste_1009.pdf

⁹ Friends of the Earth Europe (2010) More jobs less waste
http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/publications/FoEE_More_Jobs_Less_Waste_0910.pdf

wasting energy, it contributes to worsening climate change and to leachate pollution, has negative health effects and destroys job creation.

Despite evidence that the potential environmental and financial benefits of waste prevention, reuse, repair, recycling outweigh the costs, these opportunities are frequently not taken up. The European Commission's review of its waste policy provides the opportunity to reverse that trend.

MEPs have the opportunity to influence Europe's management of resources through the waste review. Ultimately, waste policy needs to align with the resource efficiency agenda to help achieve a circular economy. MEPs should support:

- The introduction of a zero residual waste target by 2020
- Mandatory separate waste collection, especially for biowaste from households and the hospitality sector
- Increased recycling rates to at least 70% for each of the main materials (paper, glass, plastic, metals and biowaste)
- A ban on landfill and incineration by 2025 and an end to the funding of these via EU Cohesion and Structural funds.

3. Businesses have a role to play too

Unless legislation is introduced to make EU businesses more resource efficient, business as usual will prevail. Instead, new business models should be promoted, such as leasing, repair and reuse, which would create many jobs in Europe. In addition, businesses should start measuring their overall resource consumption and take action to reduce it. Additional positive measures would be the introduction of long-term warranties for all products to encourage design which keeps them in use and upgraded for as long as possible.

MEPs should ensure that resource efficiency measures are applied to companies by:

- Making companies measure their land, water, carbon and material footprints so that they take action to reduce their resource consumption
- Ensuring that the European Commission gives guidance to companies on how to measure and reduce their consumption, as required by the revision of the Accounts Modernisation Directive
- Introducing 10 year warranties for all electrical and electronic products
- Promoting new business models such as leasing and making repair and reuse the norm across Europe.



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