

International Environment Council: Circular Economy package must “make sense for the recycling industry”

The European Commission’s Circular Economy package, expected to be unveiled on December 2 this year, should be ambitious as well as “market-driven” and should “make sense for the recycling industry”, insisted Emmanuel Katrakis, Secretary General of the European Recycling Industries’ Confederation (EuRIC), in addressing the BIR’s International Environment Council meeting in Prague on October 27.

“Recyclers are turning waste into new resources and putting them back into the economy,” explained Mr Katrakis. “This is the key link of the Circular Economy, and now what we hope is that this key link will also be reflected in the legislation.” Specifically, he called for a correction of the regulatory distortions that place a higher cost burden on downstream users of recycled materials, as well as for stimulation of markets for recycled materials and for greater consideration of recycling at the product design stage. Recyclers also needed “free and fair access” to the international markets “so we get a fair price in Europe and outside of Europe”, he told the meeting.

An “ambitious” European Commission Circular Economy package was anticipated by guest speaker Jaromír Manhart, Director of the Waste Management Department of the Czech Ministry of Environment. He went on to outline his country’s 10-year waste management plan adopted in 2014 which, he said, comprised “realistic” recycling targets to be reached via a uniform calculation methodology. A headline aim will be for the Czech Republic to boost its material recovery rate for household waste from less than 35% last year to 60% by 2024.

Fellow guest speaker Dr Jindřich Petřlík, Executive Director/Co-chair of Dioxin, PCBs and Waste WG Toxics and Waste Programme for the Czech Republic’s Arnika Association, argued that the United Nations’ Basel and Stockholm Conventions were not only failing to control the transboundary movement of wastes containing persistent organic pollutants (POPs) but also the recycling of POPs “which is prohibited by the Stockholm Convention”.

In addition, BIR Trade & Environment Director Ross Bartley joined with Eric Harris, Associate Counsel/Director of Government & International Affairs of the US Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, in encouraging members to support the Environmental Goods Agreement that was moving towards finalisation at the World Trade Organization (WTO). They explained that this was important because of the following: if items such as recycling machinery and equipment as well as recycled commodities were to be listed as Environmental Goods, this would ultimately lead to an overall increase in recycling by eliminating the inefficient mix of tariffs and non-tariff barriers imposed by those WTO member countries in the Environmental Goods Agreement.

Mr Bartley also pointed out that, at United Nations level, the Basel Convention was seeking partnerships with private industry to update its 1994 and other work on the environmentally sound management of household wastes, with a focus on the needs of developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

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