

Circular Economy: Europe's home appliance industry leading the way

Written by Paolo Falcioni on 16 December 2015 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

Much of the common sense thinking behind the circular economy already drives the home appliance industry says Paolo Falcioni.



The European Commission published its Circular Economy package on December 2nd. For CECEC, representing an important manufacturing sector within Europe, it was a key milestone as the Juncker Commission enters its second year.

The EU executive has a challenging task ahead as it looks to respond to the pressing need to encourage growth, a key priority for Europe; while also responding to the need to make Europe's economy more environmentally-friendly. It's a challenge that faces us all whether industry operator, consumer, young or old, rich or poor.

First indications suggest that we can be cautiously optimistic with what the Commission has published. In presenting the package Frans Timmermans, Commission First Vice-President for Better

Legislation, was careful to strike a balance between the two elements. Rules yes, but also encouragement of innovation, deepening of the Single Market and respect for aspects of our current economic model such as competitiveness.

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Back in June, at the Commission-sponsored Closing the loop boosting business, reducing waste stakeholder conference, I made the point that industry supported the principle of a circular economy and that we were actually already implementing many elements of it on a daily basis,

What we did need was to look at how Europe's future circular economy would work in practice. My members, major industrial operators, needed to understand how they could contribute to this new approach without being unnecessarily tied down.

The circular economy needs a sufficient grounding in economics and I argued for a market-based rather than more prescriptive, command control-based approach to designing products and services that home appliance manufacturers provide.

Home appliance manufacturers do what they do best and apply their innovation expertise, when there a clear supporting regulatory framework. They need freedom to innovate while accepting the setting of logical rules that are necessary.

Letting innovation bloom is one important way to ensure that in the future we can look back and see some real, tangible, measurable progress in the move towards greater circularity within Europe's economy and the green dividend that will result from it.

Freedom to innovate is perfectly compatible with generating sustainable growth within a circular economy. Many different issues are taken into account when designing innovative products - for example resource & material use, energy efficiency and consumer choice.

Respecting all these considerations makes both economic and environmental sense. And there are many challenges still ahead.

The home appliance industry is continuously working at innovative solutions to phase out hazardous substances from their products, to facilitate recycling processes and the use of secondary raw materials.

I see examples of the circular economy all around me today. It makes evident sense not to waste resources when creating products. In addition to affecting industry's reputation, environmental waste also hits profit margins if precious resources are wasted.

Home appliance manufacturers, operating in an increasingly competitive market are conscious of the fact that the efficient use of resources during a product's lifecycle - from conception to recycling cuts

unnecessary waste and leads to a significant competitive advantage.

More research is needed to assess innovative best practices already in use by industry today and how they can be further encouraged. We welcome a scientific, data and fact-based approach. We encourage the Commission to foster this process through innovation & research projects under the Horizon 2020 initiative.

I continue to be encouraged by the tone of the current Commission when it suggests it will legislate only when necessary (Better Regulation). Overdoing legislation is a bit like overcooking food.

Appliances have their main impact at the consumer use stage - especially energy consumption. So this is where the priority lies. And the rules are already in place. Any new product proposals need to be thoroughly checked to ensure that there are demonstrable environmental benefits for any new measure in question.

If the case can be made for a new requirement then it should be supported by relevant standards which ensure the repeatability, reproducibility and comparability of results.

Earlier this year, our industry presented its ten-year vision in which we underlined the importance of bringing together the acceleration of Europe's economic growth with advancing sustainable lifestyles.

The two can, and must, go hand-in-hand. Our vision is well aligned to the circular economy, one in which there is careful calibration between regulation and market-based policy approaches.

About the author

Paolo Falcioni is the Director-General of the European Committee of Domestic Equipment Manufacturers (CECED)

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