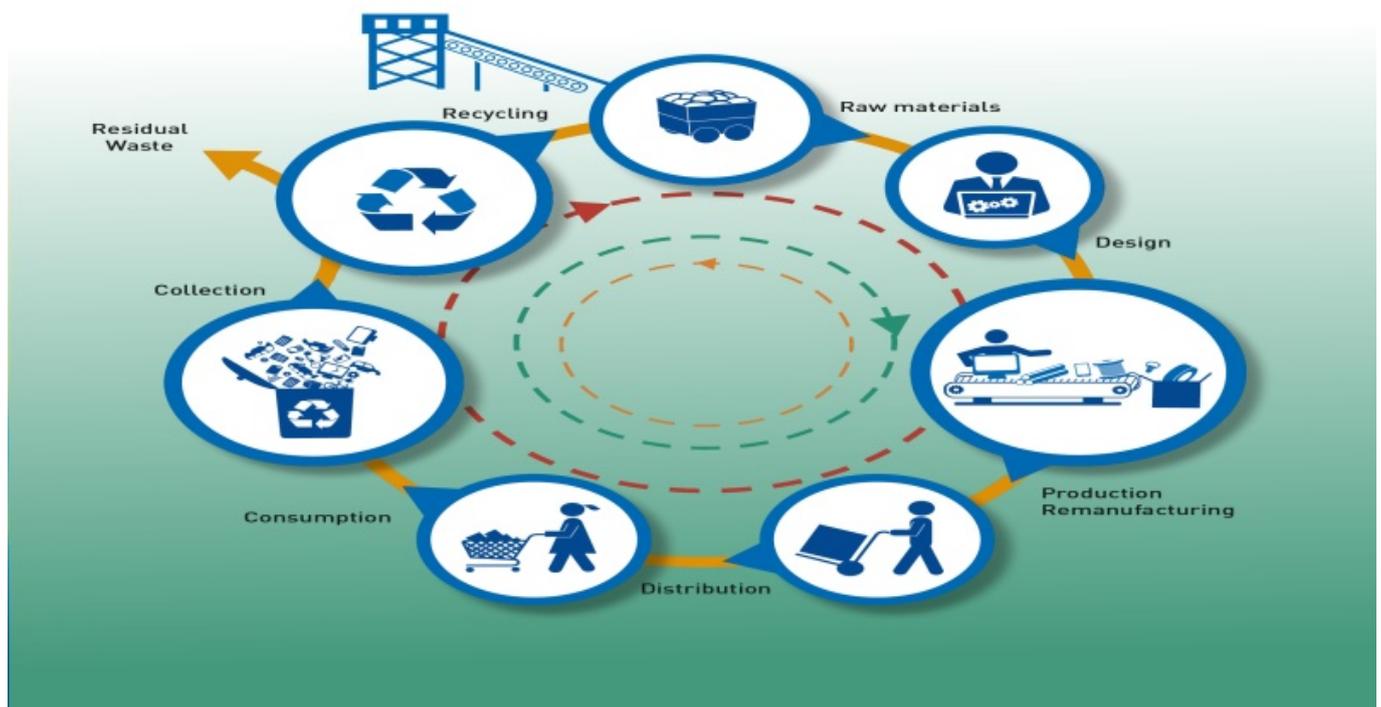


EU policymakers must reinforce the circular economy package

Written by Emmanuel Katrakis on 22 February 2016 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

Europe's recycling sector is potentially the driving force at the heart of the EU's fledgling circular economy, argues Emmanuel Katrakis.



Since the European Commission unveiled its circular economy package in December, there has been much talk about the proposed legislation's level of ambition.

Despite some criticism, the Commission's proposal is a good first step offering wider perspectives to close the loop. But we are still not where we can and should be, and the ball is in the court of the European Parliament and EU member states.

The Parliament should take the lead in ensuring that the right conditions and tools are in place for key industries to grow and fully contribute towards the shaping of tomorrow's sustainable economy.

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The recycling industry in particular has already clearly demonstrated its potential as a source of sustainable green employment.

Today the recycling industry generates hundreds of thousands of local job opportunities across the continent; jobs which cannot be outsourced as recycling usually takes place close to the point of collection.

And there remains massive untapped potential for job creation in the sector. Yet the economic viability of the industry is in many cases compromised by the lack of a level playing field, be it within the internal market or beyond to ensure that recycled materials can compete with virgin materials.

The recycling industry, like any other business, needs to operate on a level playing field. Policymakers need to ensure that when an entity engages in waste and recycling-related activities, the same rules apply for all without special rights.

Across the EU, a number of recycling companies are today facing acute situations where the lack of competitive neutrality endangers their economic viability by restricting access to waste materials.

These are the essential raw materials without which recycling is impossible. On the other hand, latest markets developments demonstrate how practical measures to boost markets for recycled materials are vital to correct market failures, as today's linear economy fails to reflect environmental externalities.

Hence, we firmly believe that more ambition is important but should not be the only driver of the new package. Europe also needs reality-driven solutions.

The circular economy package has to be reinforced to allow for the European economy to grow, deliver more jobs, and minimise the impact on the environment.

Europe's recycling businesses have proven that they can greatly contribute to this and should be at the heart of the circular economy.

With the package now on the table, discussions should focus on how to move resolutely from a waste-oriented, to a resource-oriented regulatory framework; how to strengthen value chains to boost markets for secondary raw materials and look as well for 'outside the box' solutions involving green finance or climate policy.

As MEPs sit down to begin the job of empowering the circular economy package, we hope they will start with the low-hanging fruit and enable the recycling industry to fulfil its huge potential.

To launch the debate, the European Recycling Industries' Confederation (EuRIC), with the support of the recycling company Grupo Otua, will bring together policy makers and recyclers on 1 March, [at a Conference, to discuss the package](#) [5] and explore concrete means to realise the circular economy.

Keynote speakers will include the director general of the commissions DG Environment, Daniel Calleja Crespo, MEPs Reinhard Bütikofer, Miriam Dalli and Sirpa Pietikäinen, the director in DG GROW on industrial transformation and advanced value chains, Gwenole Cozigou, and Ruben Dekker, in charge of European environment and nature policy with the Dutch EU Council Presidency.

About the author

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