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## **Adina-loana Vălean: The simple fact that the Commission proposed the circular economy package is already a change in mindset**

Written by Rajnish Singh on 8 May 2018 in Interviews  
Interviews

Adina-loana Vălean talks circular economy, plastic pollution, glyphosate, protecting Europe's forests, and reducing air pollution.



**Adina-loana Vălean** | *Photo credit: Bea Uhart*

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### **What motivated you to enter politics?**

This was a long time ago. I started as a social activist where I became interested in developing public policies. I believe that if we work together and propose good policies for the public, this is the best way of contributing towards society. I developed a passion for public policies. One of the key strategies of the Juncker Commission is the circular economy package.

## **Where do you believe progress has been made and what more need to be achieved?**

I would say the most important progress made has been in actually framing the problem. The simple fact that the Commission proposed the circular economy package is already a change in the mindset; it is a new way of looking at how we deal with waste, and at the opportunities in the economy. As part of the package, we debated a lot about waste, sorting, and recycling. We now need to speak to voters and make them understand that this is an opportunity for jobs and for businesses, to make money.

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## **So, putting forward the economic case?**

Exactly. People will become more involved and with that I think it will grow. Initiating the debate was the most important thing.

## **Do you think the circular economy package will need to be extended into the next Commission for completion?**

Possibly. Right now, I think a lot of issues have already been proposed. As in any field or sector, the real challenge will be implementation. For example, if we take sorting and recycling of waste, you will see huge differences between member states.

What the Commission needs to do is to try to work with member states and help them to develop policies. I think this is important for Europe generally.

There is a big push for proposing more and more new policies; instead, I think we should concentrate on implementing the good policies we already have. Before proposing anything else, I think it is important to see what the new multiannual financial framework (MFF) proposes in terms of new financing innovations.

Also, we need to see what new types of technologies for waste recycling are available. The EU needs money to help municipalities, administration and member states communicate campaigns to highlight the circular economy and implement the current proposals we have.

## **The problem of plastic pollution is a growing concern for people, especially in relation to how we deal with this problem. How can the EU reach its 2030 goals for all plastic packaging to be recyclable?**

For plastic, like the circular economy, the fact that the EU is recognising the problem is very

important, along with more and more people seeing plastic pollution as a serious matter. We need everyone to participate, to make tackling this problem a success.

Even if we put policies and targets in place to reduce pollution; these will only remain on paper if we do not engage with civil society NGOs, through educational programmes. Of course, it will be governments and local authorities that will have to provide the proper framework for collecting this waste.

**How can the European Parliament and the Commission persuade industry and consumers to change their thinking on the use of plastics?**

We must use plastics that can be primarily are not of low quality and be sorted and recycled. We should also be sure of what makes up this packaging, the so-called traceability of plastic products.

I am not among those saying we should no longer use plastics.

However, we must use them in a more sustainable way. We must reuse and recycle, making sure the plastic becomes a secondary raw material, not become a source of pollution.

**There has been much debate around the use of glyphosate, with the recent reauthorisation of use causing much disquiet. What can the EU do to regain citizens' trust in the chemical authorisation procedure?**

This shows that there is declining trust from the public, which is a worrying trend. However, without scientific evidence, we cannot make proper decisions on anything. Everything should not depend on fears driven by populism. We need to re-establish our trust in science, but for this we need transparency. This way, people will see how the studies were made, by whom, and what the results were.

Therefore, it is good that the Commission recently proposed a modification to the way The European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) provides authorisations, making this whole process more public and trusted.

It enables everyone to know who is responsible and what is behind the decision-making process; publishing all the data is a very good idea. It will allow those that are interested to go and look and make their own analysis on the data. This will be the best way to rebuild trust in science and in our European agencies.

**The public wants to see action on air pollution in cities. What measures do you believe the EU can take to help cities, and do you think the use of sanctions is a good policy?**

I definitely agree with the use of fines. The EU has put a lot of legislation into place, which can help if it is applied.

However, there are problems with the implementation of many pieces of legislation. The Commission can act when it sees member states not applying various EU directives correctly, by fining them, as they can initiate legal procedures.

On the other hand, the problem of the air quality also lies with public transportation where sometimes the bus fleets are not so new.

Also, other sources such as people heating their homes creates emissions in cities. Fortunately, local governments are thinking of ways of reducing pollution. There is a good exchange of practices between different regions, which is helping to come up with new ideas. People want to see a positive change in the air quality in their cities.

There are concerns about the revision of the drinking water directive. How can Parliament ensure all European citizens have access to the best quality of drinking water?

In Europe, there is good access to quality drinking water. Of course, if we look outside of the EU, we know globally how much of a challenge this can be; we are the lucky ones. Yet to sustain this quality and accessibility of water, the Commission identified several things that could be improved.

This is why they are now proposing the revision of the drinking water directive. This is a follow-up to the first European Citizens' Initiative, Right2Water, which aims to fulfil the purpose of protecting human health from the adverse effects of tap water contamination.

### **Ancient woodlands are coming under increasing commercial pressure. Is the EU doing enough to stand up to member states and industry to protect forests?**

We already have lots of regulation in place to protect forests. The Commission's Natura 2000 strategy protects biodiversity, which is very important.

More recently, the EU adopted the Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry proposals (LULUCF), which also asks for the sustainable management of forests, which I fully support.

I don't know if you know, but if a tree dies, it emits CO<sub>2</sub>. As sustainable management of forests is also something very important; it should give enough space for the development of some economic activity.

Talking about old forests, in September last year I visited Poland to see the problems relating to logging in the forest of Białowieża. This is a Natura 2000 special conservation area and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Polish government had a plan to harvest timber, however the rules for human actions in this type of sites are very clear. The European Court of Justice ruled the logging made by Poland in this forest as illegal. It was good to see that the government didn't challenge the ruling and they ceased their actions. These sites are very important for biodiversity and we should protect them.

We should make sure that when we intervene, we do so in a way so that we preserve the biodiversity.

### **What are your key priorities as Chair of the ENVI committee in the last remaining year of the Parliament?**

For me, it is very important to organise the work of the committee in an efficient way. The ENVI committee has a huge legislative workload, and we have some very important dossiers relating to the circular economy and the multiannual financial framework that all remain to be discussed.

Apart from environmental and climate change policies, we also need to pass many health reports, such as the modifications to the food law.

This will help us to regain trust in science. I am therefore very focussed on working efficiently in the

committee to try and finalise important dossiers before the end of term.

## About the author

Rajnish Singh is commissioning editor of the Parliament Magazine

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