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Putting the EU's economy on a sustainable footing

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Crafting the digital single market

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EXCLUSIVE

GLENIS WILLMOTT

... says the European Union 'can and must do more' to tackle alcohol-related harm

WASTE MANAGEMENT

EU needs resource management, not waste management

Sustainable resource management rather than focusing on waste would help boost the EU economy, argues Davor Škrlec

If we want to change citizens' ways of thinking and transform our economy through the creation of new sustainable business models, 'waste management' should be replaced with 'resource management'. Unfortunately, in less developed EU member states, waste tends to end up in landfills, despite containing valuable raw materials and accumulated energy. If we are truly committed to living in a sustainable manner, then it is high time to leave our current linear economy behind and begin the transition towards a circular economy.

Eco-design should not be restricted to the narrow prism of production and lifetime energy consumption. It needs to evolve into smart design, making it possible to perform simple repairs while using up less energy and achieving product reuse in a simpler and more energy efficient way, ultimately leading to lower power consumption in the recycling process.

There is no alternative to the first phase of waste selection. The quality of collected and classified waste is not usually a problem within the primary selection process, as it directly affects the objectives set for the recycling of certain materials. Advocates of the circular economy model say that the quality of raw materials derived from recycled waste must be equal to the quality of the raw materials that are commonly used in the production process. This level of quality is required by industry standards in terms of the quality and safety of products. The '4R' concept – reduce, reuse, recycle, recover – is at the heart of the circular economy model. Therefore, the recycling phase is delayed as much as possible in a product's lifecycle.

Eco-innovation and eco-design touch upon many different sectors. Packaging not only serves the basic purpose of protecting a product, it can also be used to attract customers by setting its appearance apart from that of competitors'. However, most packaging has a very short lifespan and regularly creates waste

that needs to be recycled. Unfortunately, statistics have shown that a high percentage of packaging is not recycled. Instead, it ends up as municipal waste and is then incinerated or dumped in a landfill. We need new technologies, solutions and innovation so that packaging can bring added value to citizens' daily lives and work, delay and increase recycling and perhaps most importantly, reduce overall energy consumption.

The industry should support the proposed extended producers' responsibility. This would allow producers to have full control over the cost of inputting material resources into production and therefore cut costs

"Sustainable waste – or rather resource – management is a clear opportunity for job creation and employment in local communities"



Davor Škrlec is parliament's Greens/EFA shadow rapporteur on waste management

without cutting jobs. The cost of consumption of material resources makes up for almost 60 per cent of total production costs, whereas labour only represents 20 per cent of costs. Sustainable waste – or rather resource – management is a clear opportunity for job creation and employment in local communities, therefore contributing to the stabilisation of Europe's economy. It would also allow the EU to implement a circular economy, or in other words, commit to the sustainable management of resources – not waste management. ★