

Creating a forward-looking approach to the Circular Economy

Speaking today after the adoption of Council conclusions on Circular Economy Action Plan, EuroCommerce Director General Christian Verschueren said:

“The conclusions drawn by Ministers echo our view that the circular economy offers major opportunities both for our sector and for society more generally. It allows everyone to rethink existing business models, offer alternative products and provide the means and support for consumers to adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. Our sector can help this process by working in two directions - both driving, and responding to, changes in the demands of consumers and society.”

Retailers and wholesalers have a long track record of commitment to improving the sustainability of their products and activities, and implemented numerous initiatives to achieve this. The sector has pioneered a range of actions, from fighting food waste, improving energy efficiency and resource use in their operations, reducing the amount of packaging, to companies setting clear targets to becoming carbon neutral. As societal commitment to the environment grows, the clearer it becomes that no single actor or sector can achieve these objectives alone. We will therefore need to ensure a coordinated approach involving regulators, suppliers, and actors within each sector.

The Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) offers a unique opportunity to address these key issues. In examining it, we would ask the Council and Parliament to pay particular attention to the need for EU action to provide legal certainty and ensure that legislative measures avoid overlapping or conflicting objectives. This means, for instance, that the definition of product sustainability should be addressed in the Eco-design Directive to help address issues such as durability with appropriate technical definitions, rather than addressing these issues in, for example consumer law. We very much support the Council’s conclusion that CEAP should address and reduce the current technological and regulatory barriers to upscaling recycled content in products.

As member of the Coordination Group of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, EuroCommerce will continue its commitment to cooperation in creating the right framework. Such a framework will encourage research and innovation in eco-design and digital technology, while also ensuring that the impact of the measures on all parts of the supply chain is properly assessed.

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EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.