

Making the circular economy work means working together

Opening the first conference on circular economy dedicated to retail and wholesale, EuroCommerce President Régis Degelcke said: *“If there are three words we should all think of in terms of the circular economy, they are cooperation, consistency and commitment. Retailers and wholesalers are pushing and will – push ahead with creating sustainable solutions, but these can only be effective with the active and committed participation of all, working together to achieve the right results across all sectors.”*

Delivering a keynote address on the state of play in circular economy, Janez Potočnik, former EU Commissioner for the Environment, and current co-chair of the UN International Resource Panel, said: *“With growing population and increased pressure on resources, circular economy is not an environmental policy, it’s a logical solution to the challenges faced in the 21st century: we need to change the way we produce, we consume and we live.”*

EuroCommerce organised this major conference today to discuss how retail & wholesale businesses can work together with government and others in the supply chain to achieve a circular economy. The main message will be the need for cooperation in giving value to resources that otherwise would have been discarded, and making this a part of normal business models. This is not just about waste management, but designing products and systems to prevent waste from the outset.

The conference was also an occasion to showcase the many initiatives by retailers and wholesalers to contribute to a more circular economy. It debated, with members of the European Parliament and NGOs, on how to overcome barriers to scale up solutions to:

- curbing food waste,
- introducing new business models in chemicals,
- addressing obsolescence and triple R in fashion retail,
- improving our deliveries in the age of e-commerce,
- and reducing our use of plastics.

Some of those actions have been captured in the 10-year-old [Retail Environmental Action Programme](#), which retailers have been running together with the European Commission.

Daniel Calleja Crespo, Director-General of the European Commission acknowledges this: *“The circular economy is an essential part of our efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, and to promote a better life for all. Striking a fair balance between deploying innovation and maintaining the safety of our products and consumers is an important part of the equation, and we recognise the efforts made by the retail and wholesale sector in this matter.”*

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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 multinational retailers such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small family operations. 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.